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Lady Seymour.

S. L. Seymour
from Lady Holland
1831.

A

TRIBUTE OF SYMPATHY,

ADDRESSED TO

MOURNERS.

BY W. NEWNHAM, ESQ.

" What sorrow was, thou bad'st him know:
And from his own, he learn'd to melt at other's woe."

GRAY'S *Ode to Adversity.*

" Happy the man who sees a God employed
In all the good and ill that chequer life;
Resolving all events, with their effects,
And manifold results, into the will
And arbitration wise of the Supreme." COWPER.

THE SIXTH EDITION.

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PREFACE.

WHEN an Author ventures to communicate his reflections to the Public, it is surely required of him, that *he* at least should be convinced of the necessity as well as the value of what he has to offer. Candour demands that he should be actuated by no sinister or unworthy motive; but that the governing principle of his conduct should be a simple desire to convey instruction or amusement to mankind at large. And when he ventures to select the same field of moral observation and inquiry, that others have previously chosen; when he professes to believe there yet remain many beauties unexplored in the same track, and indulges the hope that he can throw a new and more pleasing light on

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truths which others have investigated before him; it is justly asked on what ground he rests his claim to public attention; and why he conceives it necessary to add another, to the countless multitude of ephemeral productions.

To the question, why the Author has resolved on publishing his sentiments, he would briefly reply, that his determination has arisen from the firm conviction that such a work was still a desideratum to *the mourner*. Sustaining this character himself, by the removal of his nearest and dearest relatives, he was induced, in his hours of solitude, to seek that sympathy, instruction, and support, which his situation required, from the pen of those who had written professedly on the subject. It is true, that much which is *kind*, and *useful*, and *excellent*, is to be found in these little books: but it is equally true, (at least so it proved in his own case), that no *one*, nor indeed *all combined*, are *exactly* suited to the wants and fears, the cares and sorrows of the genuine mourner. He would

desire fully to appreciate the valuable labours of those who have preceded him, but still he would consider "a Tribute of Sympathy, *addressed to Mourners*," as desirable; and with parental fondness, he would conceive the present little work calculated in some measure to supply the existing deficiency.

During a season of sorrow the mind is softened, and prepared to receive the instruction which may be derived from its present circumstances. But to gain access to the heart, to engage the attention, and awaken the judgment to the arduous duties which the afflicted are invited to perform, it is necessary that their sorrows should be soothed, that their anguish should be respected, their feelings participated, their anxieties allayed, and their distress alleviated. The eye suffused with tears, is incapable of perusing and deriving advantage from the intrinsically excellent, but frigid declamations of the uninterested observer. The wounded heart must be healed, and the tearful eye must

first be dried, by the tenderest sympathy, ere it can attend to the lessons of instruction. The troubled bosom must be calmed, before it can be animated with the genial glow of resignation to the will of God, or be enabled to appropriate the important truths conveyed in this gloomy and mysterious providence; before it can appreciate the duties connected with its situation, or realize the prospects of mercy and comfort, with which it is surrounded. And since the mind, oppressed with care, will very soon become fatigued with simple argumentative disquisition, in which oftentimes it can scarcely feel an interest; it is devoutly to be wished, that truth should be conveyed in a style so pleasing and so chaste, as to engage the understanding, while it wins its way to the heart. And though the Author laments most sincerely, that his situation, and constant professional engagements disqualify him for the task of gratifying the refined taste of individuals, who may possibly honour him with a perusal of his work; yet he

trusts that he has in some measure succeeded in gaining a readier access to the heart, and in preparing it for the reception of truths which in another form might have been probably overlooked.

The circumstances of the mourner acquire a peculiar claim upon our tenderest regards. We are accustomed to feel compassion for every case of distress, and the hand of benevolence is readily outstretched for the relief of the indigent and the suffering poor. The sick and the miserable demand our attention, and all those comforts which a kind Providence has enabled us to bestow. Yet the mourner in a much higher degree is entitled to our sympathy. He has lost, perhaps, the friend in whom centered all his plans of earthly happiness, his every prospect is clouded by the gloom of desertion and despair, hope has abandoned a heart already overwhelmed with grief, and there is none to comfort him. If, then, we can be interested by the tale of human woe, if we can be animated with the liveliest sympathy

towards those whose distress results simply from present and bodily privation; can we refuse to drop the tear of pity over the mental sufferer; can we withhold our exertions to impart relief, or conceive an object more worthy of our active beneficence? Hence it will be acknowledged, that every attempt to alleviate the sorrows of the afflicted, to administer comfort to the mourner, and lead him to the only source of solid peace, is entitled, in so far as it accomplishes this object, to be received with indulgence.

Such, indeed, has been the exclusive design of the Author, in offering to other mourners those considerations which served to calm his own mind, those brightening prospects which led him forward to the glorious realities of an infinite and eternal world, and those reflections which he trusts had a tendency to animate him to the love and service of God. In presenting his thoughts to the Public, be has no interest to serve, no party views to promote, no favourite dogmas to enforce; his simple view is to administer conso-

lation to the afflicted, and to lead them to make a proper improvement of their sorrows. If he has failed in accomplishing this object, it has not been from want of sincerity, of earnest desire, or of as great a devotednesss to the pursuit as his professional engagements would admit, but from incapacity.

How far the present little work fulfils these intentions, must be left to the decision of an impartial censor: if the Author must relinquish the attainment of the good he has designed, he will still enjoy the satisfaction of having attempted what he conceived to be necessary, and if he shall have so far succeeded, as to administer to the comfort and improvement of such as are called to mourn for those who are translated from earth to heaven; if he may have the happiness to smooth the thorny pillow, to still the troubled bosom, to elevate the heart to God, and lead it to the only fountain of peace and consolation; then will he indeed rejoice in the delightful task he has undertaken, then will he render thanks-

giving and praise to the gracious Hand which visited him with suffering, in order to prepare him for this labour of love. He now desires to leave his little work in the hands of *Him* who alone can bless it; imploring with humble fervency, that an Almighty Father would be graciously pleased to smile on this feeble attempt to promote the honour of *his* name and the glory af *his* kingdom: and that *He* would render it instrumental in cheering and supporting the weary and the sorrowing, and in leading them to *himself*, as the only source of comfort. That those heart-broken mourners into whose hands this little Treatise shall fall, may share in the consolations of the Spirit of Grace, prays with sincerest desire,

Their obedient Servant,

THE AUTHOR.

FARNHAM,
April 26, 1817.

PREFACE

TO THE

FOURTH EDITION.

In presenting to the Public a Fourth Edition of the Tribute of Sympathy, the Author has only to express his unfeigned gratitude to Almighty God, for the many testimonies he has received of the efficacy of his little work in administering consolation to the mourner; and to add, that having carefully revised it, previously to its going to the press, he hopes he shall have rendered the present edition more acceptable to his readers.

Farnham,
1824.

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A

TRIBUTE OF SYMPATHY.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE INDULGENCE OF GRIEF.

Of all the varied emotions of which the human mind is susceptible, that arising from the exercise of sympathy, or the capacity for suffering in ourselves, the cares and sorrows of those around us, is perhaps at once the most engaging and the most extensively useful. When once excited, the heart is expanded to the full operation of the benevolent affections, and the most self-denying sacrifices are cheerfully made, in order to secure the happiness of its object. The high excitement of feeling occasioned by the exercise of this principle, is in itself so large a source of present pleasure, that we sometimes

meet with individuals who glaringly obtrude their claims to its possession; but with whom it is an ineffective stimulus to action, administering simply to their own gratification, and diverted from the obvious design for which it was implanted in the human breast, viz. the alleviation of the sufferings of humanity.

Notwithstanding the powerful influence of envy, in narrowing the circle of social kindness, yet, when this principle does not actively predominate, it is not difficult to joy with those who rejoice: and that heart must be cold indeed, which, in contemplating the happiness of others, does not experience a kindred glow of satisfaction; which does not secretly indulge a hope, that the present scene of pleasure may be long secured from the wintry air of affliction. But to participate the sorrow of friends, and truly to sympathize with their suffering, involves, not only a present emotion of disinterested benevolence, but a long train of active duties. Real sympathy will never rest satisfied with ineffective good wishes, or the common routine of polite and unmeaning profession: but it will seek to share the burden which it is unable to remove: it will enter into the feelings of the sufferer, and if it cannot dissipate the gloom

with which the death of a beloved object has enveloped his every prospect, yet will it strive to illuminate the dark and silent hours of solitude and grief, by pouring in upon the mind the balmy ray of heavenly consolation, with which even the night of desertion may be cheered. They who have suffered affliction, must have experienced the relief obtained by the participation of their sorrows, and will readily acknowledge the powerful influence of the affectionate voice of friendship, in exhibiting the sources of their consolation, soothing their aching hearts, moderating their boundless grief, and elevating their thoughts and desires to that kingdom whither their dearest friend has gone before them, and is now enjoying the perfect felicities of that rest whence every tear is eternally banished.

It is to this office that the friend who now addresses you would aspire. Like yourself, he has been visited with great distress; he has felt the want and has experienced the worth of a kind friend to whom he could confide his feelings; particularly in those seasons of solitude and seclusion, which are so earnestly desired by the mourner; but in which, the mind, left to prey upon itself, is too apt to indulge its pro-

pensity to dwell on all the *aggravating circumstances* of the present affliction, rather than on the *cause* which has rendered it necessary, the *hand* which has inflicted it, the *design* with which it is sent, or the blessing with which it is encompassed. And although the voice of sympathy may be removed from him for a short time only, yet he finds that he requires its welcome accents to be *perpetually* reiterated in his ears, and its valuable consolations to be ever before his eyes. He needs the frequent repetition of the same cheering truths, to preserve him from sinking into despondency; and a constant review of the same alleviating circumstances, the same motives to resignation, the same enlivening promises, the same animating prospects.

It is to remove this deficiency in the hour of solitude, that the present address is undertaken. Sympathy alone has induced the author to personate the character he has drawn. He has been the possessor of peace and joy for a short time, even in this world of woe. He has had every wish of his heart gratified. He has proudly contented himself with his domestic happiness, equally careless of the little troubles and vexations of the day, as of that beneficent hand

which made his cup to run over with blessings. But he has been taught the vanity of reposing his hopes in the creature. A husband and a father, death has deprived him of every earthly comfort. One short month has witnessed the dissipation of his prospects, which he had lengthened out to an almost indefinite period. He has been called to mourn his folly and his loss, and has been left alone on this wilderness world, in order that he may learn by dearly bought experience, the insufficiency of earthly pleasures, the instability of present scenes of comfort, and the perfect sufficiency of the Bible, to afford peace and consolation to the agitated mourner. He has found that the greatest afflictions convey the most instructive lessons of happiness, by demonstrating the real nature of the objects on which man places his dependence; and he hopes that the following observations may prove as cheering to others, as they were productive of serenity to himself.

Yes! my dear friend, I venture to break in upon your solitude with "a Tribute of Sympathy." Nor would I interrupt your grief; I would weep with those that weep; I would mingle my tears with yours, and during the first transports of sorrow I would only seek to

participate the agonizing feelings which overwhelm you. Perhaps you are mourning over the decease of an aged parent, the guardian and the guide of your youth, and the fond counsellor of your maturity. Or, death may have made its first inroad on the family circle, by snatching away a brother or a sister; and you may have been called to resign this endeared relative, at an age when fraternal affection had been confirmed by the award of judgment, when the varied excellencies of the character were fully expanded, and had proved it worthy of your highest esteem. Your heart may have been called to bleed over the removal of a beloved child, the development of whose dawning faculties you had carefully watched, and whom you were anxiously training up in the admonition of the Lord, and thus preparing for activity in his service. Or, to complete the climax of human woe, you may be inconsolable for the loss of a fond husband, or an affectionate wife, one with whom you had enjoyed many hours of happiness; the partner of your cares and joys, your dearest constant companion, and your best friend. You are mourning a loss which is severe indeed, a loss which is irreparable, and for which, too, you were probably unprepared. The stroke

may have been sudden: a few days, or perhaps even a few hours, may have dispelled the enchanting prospect which was before you, and of which you had just hoped to realize the pleasing illusions.

You are unexpectedly removed from the summit of human happiness, to the abyss of human woe. And shall the silent eloquence of grief be denied you? Shall a measured and philosophical sorrow be alone permitted? Shall these affecting appeals be made to the tenderest sensibilities of your nature; and shall the expression of suffering be contracted within limits, to be defined by the eye of the moralist, during a moment of calm self-complacency?—No;—the heart knoweth its own bitterness: nor can the individual who is *only theoretically* acquainted with sorrow, legislate the thoughts, the feelings, and the actions of him who is *indeed* afflicted.

Christianity does not require this unnatural restraint; but distinctly teaches, that affliction for the present "is not joyous but grievous." The silent apathy of the stoic is perfectly inconsistent with the exercise of Christian fortitude. The heartless obedience of the unfeeling, differs most essentially from the resignation of the *feeble* but *sincere* Christian. It is no argument

in favour of the possession and influence of Christian principle, to *bear with submission* losses and suffering which we do not *feel*. This, indeed, evinces only culpable indifference to the events of God's providence, and to the particular design with which *He* has seen fit to correct us: it is the offspring of carelessness and contempt, rather than the expression of resignation. It is provoking the anger of a righteous God, by refusing to listen to *His* voice, who speaks more powerfully and energetically to the heart, through the medium of affliction, than man can do, by all the *powers of abstract reasoning*. It is incurring the judgment denounced against those "who have not grieved," when *He* had afflicted them—"who have refused to receive correction," when *He* had consumed them—"who have made their faces harder than a rock, and have refused to return."*

Since, then, insensibility to the chastening hand of God is so clearly pointed out as displeasing to *Him*, it surely follows, that to *feel* most sensibly the wound *He* has inflicted, and to express that feeling, is not improper in itself, though it may become so when excessive in *degree*. Weep on then, my dear friend: indulge

* Jer. v. 3.

your sorrow; lay open the recesses of your aching heart to the bosom of friendship, and more especially make them known to that Friend who has chastened you for your profit. Recollect, that you are never less alone, than when alone. God is every where present, and ready to afford consolation and support to those who call upon him. His providence watches over all: he makes his sun to rise upon the evil and the good; he is acquainted with the secrets of your heart; he sees your distress; he waits to be gracious; he is infinitely wise to guide and direct, and kind and beneficent, as well as unlimited in ability, to give you peace and joy. It is his delight to dwell with the humble and contrite heart, to revive the spirit of the humble, to be present with his people in their affliction, to put underneath them his everlasting arms, and sustain them under the pressure of the greatest misfortunes.

When his servants, in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, refused to infringe the laws of the Lord their God, and were cast into the furnace of fire, he exhibited his power to save, and his delight to support them in suffering, by his presence; for "there were seen four men walking in the midst of the fire, who had no hurt: and the form of the fourth was like unto the Son of

God."* And, although we do not now expect the same visible interference and miraculous preservation, we are assured that the people of God are equally his peculiar care; that it is his delight to be doing them good, and that he is ever nigh unto them by his word and by his Spirit. His ear is open to their cry: this almighty Friend is always accessible; he is willing to listen to their complaints, and he has the power to soothe their sorrows. Come then to this Friend, and pour out your heart before him; detail all your cares, and seek to obtain the benefit which he has intended; trust yourselves, and your all in his hands, and then you shall find that he is a very present help in trouble; that, in opening your heart unto him, the severity of your grief has been mitigated; and that you have in heaven, a Friend which loveth at all times, a Friend more certainly endeared than the nearest and most perfect human relation.

Our Lord Jesus Christ himself has left us an example of a real mourner: he was indeed "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." It is recorded of him, that he wept over the grave of Lazarus, and that, because he loved him. He does not rebuke the tears of the

* Dan. iii. 25.

bereaved relatives, though he strives to comfort them: and, so far from affording to his followers an example of unmoved suffering, "he is troubled," he "groaned in his spirit;" yea, he drops the tear of sympathy and affection over the deceased.* Jesus was a mourner here below, and he has smoothed the rugged path of sorrow, by leaving us an example, not of unyielding indifference, but of submission to the will of his heavenly Father, and of the relief bountifully provided for the sufferer, in weeping over his loss. And although it is not now the first concern of our Lord and Saviour, to recall to earth the object of his solicitude; yet the bodies of his people are his peculiar charge, and he will raise them up at the last day to glory, and honour, and immortality.

This idea beautifully illustrates *his* divine compassion; "for we have not an High Priest, which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."† He knows the extent of your sufferings, for he has felt the same: *his* heart overflows with pity, and is expanded towards you, in all the fulness of redeeming grace and dying love; you are interested

* John xii. 21. † Heb. iv. 15.

in his compassionate regards, and *he* seeks to allure you to himself. He invites you to cast your burden upon him, and is only seeking, by this light affliction, to recall your wandering affections from the creature, and to withdraw your erring footsteps from the uncertain track of time and sorrow, to the satisfying pursuit of substantial good. He seeks that the heart may be softened and rendered accessible; and he appears, not as a God of judgment, but of mercy —chastising, but in love—afflicting, but from the purest compassion—and supporting with the richest consolations. He sees, he feels your sorrow—he hastens to your relief—he interposes his cheering presence—his animating voice. He says, "Weep not," and proclaims himself as the "resurrection and the life." Yes! he comes to you in the endearing character of friend, he calms your agitated bosom by his sympathy, he comforts by his Spirit, supports by his grace, and leads your thoughts onward to that glorious period of immortality and peace, when you shall be re-united to your lost relative, in realms of unfading bliss; and shall associate with his glorified spirit, now transformed into the image of your mutual Redeemer, in ascribing all the glory of your salvation and eternal felicity to the

"Lamb that was slain." Our great High Priest and Advocate still lives and reigns to make intercession for us; he is

> "Unchangeably faithful to save,
> Almighty to rule and command."

"Let us, therefore, come boldly unto a throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need."* Let us commune with our own hearts, and with this almighty Saviour, that we may listen to his voice, and obey his word, and follow him whithersoever he leadeth.

* Heb. iv. 16.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE MODERATION OF GRIEF.

CHRISTIANITY does not forbid its disciples to *mourn;* but rather sanctions the expressions of grief, occasioned by the loss of friends, when viewed as the consequence of sin generally, as the result of our own carelessness and folly, and as forming a part of that probationary discipline which is designed to prepare us for another and a better world. Grace does not destroy, but simply regulates nature; it does not supersede the affections or forbid their influence, but only moderates and directs their exercise.

Could we distinctly view every object and event through the chastened medium of Christianity, there would be no danger in the indulgence of grief: there would be no fear of offending God, by weeping over the loss of those blessings which he has conferred, together with

all capacity for their enjoyment: there would be no necessity to restrain the exercise of those affectionate sympathies which he has implanted in our bosoms, as the source of many of our pleasures, and the principle upon which *much*, and that the most admirable part of our conduct is grounded.

The feeble glimmering light of nature is insufficient to guide our affections or actions. The objects we perceive through this medium are so distorted by prejudice, so deceptive by their energetic appeal to our feelings and passions, that our judgment is rendered vacillating and uncertain; and we become incapable of forming a correct estimate of their real nature, and of their respective combinations and affinities; or of the results to which they lead. But the torch of divine truth enables us to discover the way in which we should walk; it unmasks prejudice, develops the secret influence of feeling, dispels the mists of error, and, by its clear and steady radiance, safely guides and invigorates the sincere inquirer; discloses to him the hidden treasures of hope and regulates his conduct by its own unerring laws. We no longer walk in darkness and uncertainty, but are enabled to descry the dangers we must avoid, as

well as the object we must pursue, and the means by which it may be attained.

The Christian mourner is not left in doubt as to the limits which should define his sorrow: for, although we must rejoice at the present, eternal, and unfading happiness of the spirit of the departed Christian, and the infinite and incalculable value of the exchange he has made; yet to mourn for the dead, and more particularly for those who die in the arms of their Lord, is a duty which nature and affection demand—which is perfectly compatible with the purest influence of religion, sanctioned by the example of eminent saints, and required by God himself. Abraham, that faithful servant of the most high God, mourned for Sarah. "Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her." So did Jacob for his son Joseph, and Joseph and his brethren for their father Jacob.* Instances might be multiplied; but the bare mention of these is enough to prove, that to mourn, was not inconsistent with their patriarchal piety and primæval simplicity. Indifference to the death of the righteous has been plainly reproved by the Spirit of Truth, who declares that "the righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to

* Gen. xxiii. 2; xxxvii. 34; l. 10.

heart."* It is not then sorrow in itself, but its excessive indulgence, which is to be avoided by the Christian; for "godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of."†

It is indeed true that affliction is grievous to be borne; and it is equally true, that the ravages of intemperate grief intercept our views of the Great Disposer of all events and of the hearts of men, becloud our prospects of eternity, depress the spirits, shrivel and contract the heart into the coldest selfishness, and impair the health of the body. Grief is a passion which requires the greatest watchfulness: for its influence steals upon us insensibly, under the disguise of positive duty; and acquires the power of expanding itself to an almost indefinite extent, till it has so occupied the heart, that there is great danger lest it should overwhelm us, and prevent our deriving those advantages from affliction which our merciful Father has intended. Hence it is enjoined, that Christians should moderate their sorrow: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him."‡ Excessive sorrow is combined in the same precept with that

* Isa. lvii. 1. † 2 Cor. vii. 10.

‡ Prov. iii. 11.

hardness of heart which refuses to be softened, and to feel under the chastening hand of God. We are commanded not to faint; hence, sorrow should be so moderated as not to interfere with the discharge of the private duties of religion. It should bring us to God more humbly, more intimately, and more devoutly, rather than alienate us from him. If we indulge the soft luxury of grief, our minds will become enfeebled for religious duties; we shall be completely absorbed in contemplating the occasion of our sorrow, and we shall scarcely lift from the heart one aspiration of praise to Him who doth all things well.

Perhaps we have lost an object which we loved with idolatrous affection. Almighty God has seen fit to remove that which rivalled the possession of our hearts; how careful should we be, that we do not embrace another idol—that we do not supply the vacuity death has made in our affections, by yielding ourselves to the uncontrolled dominion of that sorrow which "worketh death!" The eyes of the world are fixed upon professors of religion, especially on those who are removed from the obscurity of humble life; and it expects now to perceive the influence of those animating and consoling truths which

had been so frequently extolled. It does not expect to find them without a refuge from the storm, a prey to the influence of ungoverned passion, and overwhelmed by the agony of despair. It does not expect to find them sullenly complaining or indeed silently suffering what they know to be *inevitable*, as if it resulted from a fatal necessity, governed by chance, or directed by the wildest caprice. It will not even grant those allowances which the infinite variety of natural temper and disposition, and of the strength of the intellectual powers, appears to demand. It will require that the influence of the principles they profess, and the doctrines they believe, shall be *exemplified in their conduct:* it will expect that their minds shall be calmed by a consideration of the goodness of God, and the equity of his government; by his wisdom, and his gracious designs towards his children; by a prospect of that rest which remaineth for the people of God, and by a firm reliance on his promise, that all events shall advance the *best* interests of those who love him. It will expect that they will cheerfully resign, when *he* calls for it, their dearest earthly comforts, without murmuring; and that on the whole, they will evince a peaceful serenity of

temper in the most distressing circumstances. Religion is indeed much exposed to contempt, by the immoderate sorrow of those who profess their belief of its truths. If, says the objector, its mild precepts, its animating hopes, its supporting promises, and its consoling anticipations, so frequently the subject of discussion in the peaceful hour of prosperity, be insufficient to support the mourner under the immediate loss of his relatives and friends, surely these can be of little value; and the consolations of philosophy are equally important. If religion and its hopes and joys be, as they are represented, an all-satisfying good; how is it that he is so overwhelmed with sorrow, at the loss of one who has entered into his rest, and who by his removal has rendered earth less pleasing, and has engaged his affections more exclusively in heaven? He has one attachment the fewer to the world, and he possesses an additional attachment to heaven; whence, by his own principles, his religious pleasures should shortly be increased. To be thus absorbed in sorrow, manifestly indicates inconsistency with the possession of such cheering doctrines, and evinces that he does not really believe the truths he pertinaciously contends for, or that they are not in their nature and influence

such as they are asserted to be. Thus, in fact, the prejudices of the irreligious are strengthened on every side: and surely Christians should be doubly careful, lest they oppose the influence of Christianity, by placing obstacles to its reception in the way of others.

The followers of our ascended Saviour are commanded not to sorrow "even as others which have no hope," and are pointed to one grand source of consolation; "for, if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again; even so them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him."* Here is a positive injunction that Christians should moderate their grief; and a most powerful reason is annexed; for, if we believe the fundimental truths of the Bible, we are assured that the disembodied spirit of the deceased, over whom affection sheds its fondest tear, is *now* infinitely happier than on earth: it would not exchange its present peace for the cares and sorrows it has just quitted, for all the world calls good or great. From the enjoyment of such present felicity we would not wish to recall him whom we have lost: our thoughts are led forward to the happy period, when *we*, if the people of God, shall join the chorus of the re-

* 1 Thess. iv. 13, 14.

deemed; and unite with his glorified spirit, in ascribing "glory, honour, and blessing to Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever."

Again, the Christian remembers that every event is under the superintendence of God; and that, from whatever immediate source the present affliction may appear to spring, still it originates with Infinite Wisdom, and is directed in its period, and in all its circumstances, by Infinite Love. He knows that he is in the hands of a merciful and faithful Creator, and trusts in his power and goodness, though he cannot distinctly trace *that* hand which governs even the minutest event. There are many natural phenomena, of which we cannot possibly fathom the rationale; but we are assured, that these are influenced by laws as definite, as any others with which we are more intimately acquainted. We cannot attempt to trace the footsteps of Omnipotence: our constricted capacities are incapable of discovering the ways of Providence; but we are happy in the assurance that the powers of Omniscience are engaged in fixing and preserving in its order every occurrence. The Lord of heaven and earth sees, and knows, and governs all things—the motion of an atom and a world:

and though we are ignorant of his designs, we may safely confide in *Him* who does and will direct all contingencies.

" I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it," is the language of humble and submissive confidence. While Nature weeps, the Christian remembers that every painful event has been appointed by omniscient goodness; and while the silent tear steals down his grief-worn cheek, he will not be utterly cast down; he will review the mercies which have followed him all the days of his life; and perceiving that those events which he now esteems his greatest blessings, were painful in their nature, he will come and make his complaint to God, and not to man. While his heart and eye tend upwards to the sky, he will not be in danger of excessive sorrow; for he will supplicate a gracious Father with deep humility, for the sinful cause which has rendered affliction necessary, and yet with filial confidence, assured that *he* will not lay upon him a burden heavier than he can bear; assured that in due time, when *his* gracious design shall have been accomplished, *he* will give him peace, and deliver him from every distress. These considerations will prove sufficient to excite him to assuage his grief. He dares not mur-

mur, or call in question the goodness or the justice of God; for *he* invites his children to pour out their requests unto him; and though in great mercy he sees fit frequently to deny them what they ask, yet he always giveth liberally, and gives exactly, not that which may be most pleasing, but which will be best for them in the present and a future world.

CHAPTER III.

ON EXCESSIVE SORROW.

It is not easy to define the precise limits where every kind and degree of sorrow becomes excessive; for a moment's reflection will convince, that expressions of grief, which nature and religion both demand and allow, under the severe sufferings to which humanity is exposed, would be unjustifiable and sinful under the lighter cares and perplexities of daily life. There are many persons who view their own trials through a magnifying medium: they unjustly trace out aggravating circumstances, which a fond selfishness alone can discover, and thus endeavour to excuse their impatience, by the supposed weight of suffering under which they labour. They conceive their affliction to be more severe than ever was intended by its Author; and, unaccustomed to the yoke, they vainly imagine that

no burden is equal to theirs, and believe that *their* complaints may lawfully exceed the bounds prescribed for others. Yet it is manifest, that the same indulgence of grief cannot be allowed to the sufferings of unsubdued passion, as to those real mourners, who are borne down with the weight of their sorrows, and with a humbling sense of God's justice and mercy in their infliction:—to those whom God hath wounded in the tenderest relations, and who feel the full extent of human wretchedness.

Some allowance must be made for natural disposition, and the peculiar texture of individual minds. Let not one pride himself on his submission to afflictive providence, when in truth his equanimity arises from the absence of those acute feelings which constitute the man of quick sensibility. Let not that be termed patience, which consists in indifference; nor suffer that to be extolled as a virtue, which is a mere gift of nature, or the offspring of a mind well trained and disciplined in the depths of abstract reasoning, and rendered less susceptible of the acute feelings a more lively imagination would experience. Nature has cast some minds in a sterner mould: their perceptions are correct—their associations few and accurate—their judgment firm

—their sensibilities obtuse; while she has endowed others with a greater degree of vivacity, quick and inaccurate perception, lively and unlimited association, and a judgment too frequently influenced, and even carried away, by the acuteness of their feelings. In characters so unlike, the expression of sorrow will be different in degree, and dissimilar in kind. That sorrow which would be excessive, and therefore sinful, in the former character, may be safely allowed to the latter. In either case, the principal difference will consist in the *external expression* of grief; and there will still remain certain precepts, whereby the heart of each may alike be tried and regulated. These will apply to all; and each individual may thus form a judgment for himself, far more easily than those who frame their opinion from external appearances.

What then is the *tendency* of your grief? Does it lead your heart to God, or alienate you from him? Does it engage your thoughts and affections principally, on the circumstances of the affliction which has befallen you, or on the gracious design with which it has been commissioned? When the Almighty extends his chastening arm, it is to remind us that he is our

chief good, to abstract our hearts from objects of inferior moment, or to purify and fit us for a closer walk with him here, and for more intimate communion with *him* hereafter. This design can alone be effected by our returning to him in sincerity, earnestly striving, that we may be more entirely devoted to his service, that our hearts may be more expanded by a Saviour's love, and that our affections may be animated with the desire of living to his glory.

Are you anxious to view all your trials in this light. and to come to God, and to him alone, for comfort and support? Do you delight to have your thoughts much with him, pray to him, and diligently strive that the end for which affliction was designed, may be accomplished in you? Or do you rather fondly dwell on the value of the blessing you have lost, and still concentrate your affections on that gift which a merciful God has seen fit to remove? Do you rather excite the mind to the recollection of past scenes of happiness, so fondly and so properly endeared to memory—to your prospects of earthly pleasure, withered by the chilly gale of premature mortality, and to your present forlorn condition, while you lose sight of the hand of God? Then is your sorrow excessive, for it is

opposed to the will of heaven, and you are suffering without the possibility of appropriating those cheering consolations which are provided for the humble mourner.

But again,

> "There's mercy in every place;
> And mercy, encouraging thought!
> Gives even affliction a grace,
> And reconciles man to his lot."

Hence, sorrow becomes excessive, when we forget the goodness of God, displayed in the expressions of his mercy and his love, which we *have* enjoyed—which we even now participate; and are looking forward to the full disclosure of his merciful intentions towards us. The ways of God do indeed sometimes seem marked with severity. He knows our whole hearts better than we do ourselves: and of all possible things in this world, *he* does that which is most adapted to make us feel. Probably, when you examine the present affliction, you will find that the stroke is such, whether you consider the person, the period, the place, and a hundred circumstances and associations, past or then expected; and thus will you trace the design of God, and obtain a consciousness that no other hand could have inflicted it.

Nothing can be more erroneous than the indulgence of suspicions concerning the goodness of God. *He* is a righteous governor; his conduct is not directed by arbitrary caprice, nor is it the offspring of envy, since "justice and judgment are the establishment of his throne." * "*But God is also love.*" † His gracious determination to secure our happiness, and fix it on a permanent basis, gives existence to those very events, which we are sometimes disposed to construe into acts of unkindness, and deplore as pregnant with the greatest evils. This assurance, therefore, should lead us to bow to his dispensations, not only because they are on our part quite unavoidable; but *submissively*, under a conviction, that if we "love him, and are the called according to his purpose, all things will work together for our good." ‡ When the *stream* is dried up, our condition is not hopeless nor cheerless, if we have constant access to the *fountain*, and find it always overflowing with GOOD. When the creature interposes between God and us, and we cannot contemplate the former for the latter, surely it is not unkind, that *he* should remove the intervening veil, in

* Ps. lxxxix. 14. † 1 Ep. John, iv. 9.

‡ Rom. viii. 28.

order that *he* may acquire his own perfect right, and at the same time, that we may be made substantially and permanently happy.

Besides, are there no circumstances of alleviation? Is it the worst possible evil that has befallen you? and is every aggravating association concentrated in this one event? Perhaps, you may be inclined to answer in the affirmative; but inquire whether it might not have been worse with you, whether instead of your present pleasing hope of the immediate happiness of your deceased friend, you might not have been harassed with doubts, and fears, and apprehensions respecting his safety; whether your expectation of being one day re-united around the throne of God, might not have been involved in the uncertainty of your own state, and of your prospects of future blessedness; and, if these consolations be absent, whether you might not have been in the same situation with your lost relative, have passed the boundary of time, and have been reduced to that state, where you would be alike incapable of entering into the joys, as of preparing for the services of eternity?

Religion can trace mercy and comfort, even in the darkest hour; and her chaste rays reflected from the pages of inspiration, will render per-

vious the thickest gloom, since she exhibits present good and future joy as the result of present suffering improved. It is not only in our actual circumstances that we trace the goodness of God, but in their ultimate and more remote results: since these form a part of that discipline which is to prepare us for a future happy existence in a world of everlasting bliss: and to lose sight of all these alleviating circumstances, is as unbecoming the character of the Christian, as it is offensive to the Majesty of heaven.

Unrepressed and intemperate grief leads us to distrust the faithfulness and love of the *Most High*, to call in question his justice, to arraign his providence: and thus discontent is fostered in our bosom, corroding every comfort, distorting all our views, and sapping the foundations of our peace. When we first deviate from the narrow path of rectitude, the gradations of error are so frequent and imperceptible, that we are conducted to a labyrinth of uncertainty, before we are aware that we have quitted the way of truth; and when once lost, it is with the utmost difficulty we can regain our former positions. It is not *at once* but gradually, that we are induced to entertain doubts concerning the wisdom and justice of God. We should shrink at first from

the decided avowal of such a conclusion; the mind must be prepared for it, by the slow and silent, but constant and equable operation of minor suspicions, which ultimately lead to this unhappy result. *Short-sighted intellect* may indeed be at a loss to discover a reason, why this particular affliction is necessary, and, from being disappointed in the search, may be induced to imagine that *there was no cause:* and between this avowal, and the immediate distrust of God's goodness and faithfulness, the gradation is so gentle, that the latter is early presented to the mind. This sentiment, rejected at first with aversion, begins to be tolerated from the unvaried repetition of the same image; is then entertained with complacency; and, finally, received as a legitimate conclusion. This step once gained, we can readily imagine how the heart will be drawn aside, and suffer itself to disbelieve the other attributes of the Deity, and to doubt his wisdom, and power, and love. The peace of the troubled bosom is destroyed; and peevishness, discontent, and fretfulness are the consequence. The temper is soured, because the mind is exposed to a constant source of irritation, with no balm to sooth the angry passions, or calm the aching heart. How watchful should

we be against the first beginnings of evil, since we perceive how easily sorrow may become excessive, and how certainly it will then hurry us away into a thousand inconsistencies, which the genius of Christianity blushes to acknowledge.

This error may be committed by taking pains to provoke and re-excite our grief, by a careful recapitulation of circumstances, which are infinitely dear to memory till they become too exquisitely painful to be borne. The *first* transports of sorrow, who would venture to oppose? Nature attempts her own relief, by these expressions of the wounds she has received: but grief has a natural tendency to exhaust its own violence; the feelings become less acute from fatigue; and the gradual waste and expenditure of their energy, at length brings the mind to a state of tolerable composure. Christian principle should now be invited to confirm what nature has effected, for this state of quiescence is only the prelude to a storm. The diminished excitability of the mourner will soon be recruited, and his sufferings will be felt with redoubled violence. Nothing short of Christianity and its animating hopes can render permanent the calm, by exchanging the quietude of exhausted power, for the peace and serenity of religious consola-

tion. Instead, however, of having recourse to this powerful principle, we may, with all the ingenuity of self-torture, busily engage ourselves in stimulating the languid feelings, and goading the already fluttering heart to increased action, by the detail and recollection of every painful association connected with this sad event. Christianity demands not that we should be forgetful of the dear comfort we have lost; but that we should contemplate the affliction through the medium of revelation; and that we should studiously endeavour to engage the mind with the blessings designed, and the consolations provided for the humble sufferer, rather than allow it to become the prey of its own mournful images.

By the indulgence of excessive grief, the health is decidedly endangered. It is difficult to define the nature of the connexion which subsists between the mind and the body; our knowledge respecting it is almost entirely limited to an acquaintance with the effects produced by their reciprocal action. Although the existence of this sympathy may be denied by those who plead for the unrestrained indulgence of their sorrow, yet nothing can be more certain. We see every day the one suffering with the other, the manifestations of mind enfeebled by disease, and

the animal economy materially disturbed by disorders of the mind. It is well known how instantaneously joy or grief will pall the appetite; that it is impossible to cure many derangements of the animal system, whilst any cause of mental irritation exists; and that many maladies are immediately produced by the influence of depressing passions. The indulgence of excessive grief, then, is by no means innocent, since, although its immediate effects may be escaped, it may still lay the foundation of insidious disease, which, though long protracted, may in the end terminate fatally. Nor is this caution unnecessary; for many mourners practice a kind of self-deception, by allowing themselves to believe their health is not endangered, provided no immediately serious ravages are perceptible to themselves, while yet their strength is visibly declining. It is true, the *vigour* thus impaired may be recovered, and that quickly: yet care is necessary: and when we recollect, that in the code of laws to which we profess to yield obedience, there is a command which says, "Thou shalt not kill;" and reflect that every prohibition implies a positive injunction; we must surely allow that such a precept requires that all lawful means be assiduously employed for the preserva-

tion of our own life, as well as the lives of others.

Life is desirable; during its rapid progress, our eternal destiny is fixed; and when the body can no longer be inhabited, the immortal spirit which actuated it is immediately translated to the enjoyment of exquisite pleasure or endless punishment. It is rendered sensible of the exhaustless treasures of infinite love, or of the deserved anger of a just and holy God. This gives to life its chief value: now is the accepted time: now is the day of grace, and are we yet prepared to die? With what thankfulness should we enjoy, with what care should we cherish, life and health, until we gain substantial evidence that we are ripening for an inheritance with the saints in light, until we enjoy a pleasing hope of eternal felicity!

And even supposing, that on this head we are as completely at rest, as was the Apostle Paul, when he said, "to die is gain;" alluding to himself; yet we should remember, that connected with this expression, is the assertion, "for me to live is Christ."* We cannot be said to live to Christ, if we do not embrace every opportunity of employing the talents we possess in

* Phil. i. 21.

offices of piety, and the various and constantly increasing duties of disinterested benevolence. The Christian's is an active life; he is called to do good, and to glorify God. How many are there, whose earthly happiness, materially, if not essentially depends upon us: how many whose sorrows we may sooth, whose burdens we may contribute to support, whose miseries may be lessened, whose ignorance may be dispelled, whose happiness may be enhanced by our exertions! Performed on right principles, these things are acceptable to Christ; and we should recollect, that it is only during the short uncertain space of life, that we shall enjoy an opportunity of pleasing God in this way, and of being thus useful to others.

The same may be observed with regard to the eternal interests of our fellow-men. The light of truth dispels the darkness, by which the God of this world rules; and Christians should shine as lights in the world, pointing out the way to glory. How impenetrable the gloom by which we are surrounded; and how inadequate, how comparatively feeble and glimmering is the faint light emitted by the followers of our Redeemer! Let us not be among those who voluntarily extinguish their light, or put their candle under a

bushel: let us rather most carefully preserve our health, as the choicest earthly blessing. May we be quickened by the love of Christ, and according to his holy precept and example, diligently diffuse the light of life, by our words, our spirit, and our conduct!

But again, a degree of sorrow which has escaped the foregoing limitations, may become excessive by its protraction. It is not pretended that sorrow or mourning should have a limited duration, and that regret for the loss of the dear objects of our fond esteem, should quickly find a termination. This, indeed, would seem to be the effect of *lightly esteeming* the chastisements of the Almighty; or to arise from the want of proper affection for the deceased, whose loss we cease to deplore because we do not feel. This would be highly inconsistent with the Christian character. But it is distinctly asserted, that a *degree of sorrow*, which might fairly be allowed to the mourner, when suffering the first emotions of grief, may still become sinful by its continuance; and that *it does so*, when its expression is incompatible with the discharge of the duties assigned us by Providence, when it unfits us for necessary intercourse with society, when it em-

bitters our present comforts, and incapacitates us for worshipping and praising God.

If it be asserted that these limitations are too precise to be universally applicable, and that, however true they may be as general rules, they will still admit of particular exceptions; who is there that will not plead his title to individual exemption? Who is there that does not fancy his own to be the weightier affliction? Who would not determine *his* to be the precise circumstances which would admit of excessive sorrow? The great mass of mankind are deceived by their general reception of particular precepts, as speculatively true, which they individually and practically disregard. Thus all men think all men mortal but themselves: they will yield their cordial assent to the sinfulness of human nature, provided their individual freedom from its pollution may be granted: they will acknowledge the danger of certain errors and temptations, to almost all others but themselves. Thus are they deceived—saying, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace:" they lose sight of the immediate connexion of their happiness with the exercise of constant obedience; they busy themselves in discovering the vices, and exposing the errors of

others, and applying appropriate remedies, while they forget their own heart.

To allow individual exemption from the influence of these restraints, would be to render them perfectly inert; impartial investigation will evince the universality of their application. It may, indeed, be pleaded, that all your hope and joy was bound up and centered in the life of the deceased, that you were abundantly happy in his society, and that, while permitted to enjoy it, you knew no care or sorrow, and wished for no addition to your joy. Yet does not this prove the necessity of the affliction; even because of your inordinate attachment. Perhaps you will conceive that you have no comfort remaining, or you will regret that your friend is removed from a sphere of eminent usefulness, and will fondly imagine that his habitual preparedness for heaven rendered him peculiarly fitted for a longer residence on earth: you will deplore the very short time you enjoyed his society on this wilderness world, and the long and dreary night of mourning and solitude, which you have before you.

It would be quite endless to attempt the enumeration of the infinitely varied pleas for immoderate sorrow, which the different circum-

stances of individual mourners will elicit; or to expose the ingenuity by which a thousand protean forms of excuse are invented: yet we shall find, that they all resolve themselves into the powerful principle of selfishness.

The desire of present freedom from pain is natural to man: "but should it be according to thy mind?" * Wilt thou, O vain man, contend with Him that formed thee? Wilt thou bring thy judgment into opposition with the decrees of Infinite Wisdom? Shall the short-sighted reasoning of mortality be placed in competition with the determinations of Omniscience? Shall thy blind and foolish self-love be opposed to the designs of infinite goodness, and mercy, and love? Wilt thou, a perishing creature, presume to give laws to Omnipotence, and to obtrude thy puny will against *His* who doth all things well; whose boundless presence fills every heart, and directs every event; who governs all things by his power, and without whose supervision not the smallest circumstance can come to pass? Reflect on the incongruity of such conduct; consider thy situation as his *servant*, and the perfections of the Almighty Disposer of all things. Seriously recollect, that impatience

* Job xxxiv. 33.

under his chastening hand is highly offensive. The all-wise Jehovah afflicts with the most gracious design; his chastisements are sent on the kindest errands of love: what ingratitude to despise his correction, to murmur at his dispensations, and to be impatient for the removal of affliction, before it shall have accomplished the end he has proposed! Surely, if we reflect on the comparatively minute section of our lives dedicated to this salutary discipline; if we appreciate the long intervals of ease and prosperity frequently allotted to us, the many comforts with which our darkest hours are interspersed, and the secure refuge from the storm which is provided for our safety and comfort; discontent and impatience will be banished from our bosom, every expression of immoderate grief will be hushed to repose, and our hearts will be animated by affectionate obedience to the will of *Him*, in whom we live and move, and have our being, and who is infinitely worthy to receive our humble adorations, and our highest ascriptions of praise.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF SORROW.

A DISTINGUISHING feature of the Christian religion, is the state of trial and of suffering it involves; as the grand mean of perfecting the character of its disciples, bringing out their principles into active exercise, proving their sincerity, purifying their hearts, elevating their affections, chastening and improving their temper and dispositions, and as the prelude to that eternal rest and happiness which are reserved for the people of God, *for those who are made perfect through sufferings.*

It is indeed true, that religion's "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are paths of peace."* Yet it is equally true, that to fallen man, the obedience it requires is repugnant, the duties it enforces are painful: and the

* Prov. iii. 17.

sufferings inseparably connected with its exercise, so far from communicating peace, serve to excite the angry turbulence of our nature, and to fill the heart with innumerable solicitudes. It is only when the mind becomes convinced of the infinite excellence of divine truth, of the holiness of its precepts, and the importance of the realities it developes; when the heart is animated with the love of God, and with its dependence on *Him* in whose favour is life, that it can unfeignedly embrace the self-denying precepts of Christianity, that it can rejoice to "suffer all things," that it may "win Christ, and be found in him." Christianity does not consist in a certain scheme of doctrines and precepts, which demand our assent: it is a practical principle, a principle of action, constantly and universally operative, giving its peculiar tone and temper to the entire character, and pervading and influencing every part of the conduct. It is not a principle which we can assume to-day, and dispense with to-morrow, according to our particular feelings and interests: but we must be alike governed by its influence, in *whatever* circumstances we may be placed. We are not required, nor would it be prudent or proper, to be always talking about religion; but by our ex-

ample, which will speak louder than words, we should evince its holy tendency, and regulate our conduct by its dictates.

But this by the way; for, while the genius of Christianity requires us to be active in doing the will of God, it demands our passive obedience: it teaches us to suffer, and exhibits a state of trial as the only way to a haven of eternal rest. The voice of affliction silently, but energetically, whispers, "My son, give me thine heart."* God demands the whole heart: he will reign in the affections of his people, and requires their will to be ceded implicitly to his commands. Sorrow serves to prove the heart, and to discover to us whether this is really the case— whether we can resign our blessings into the hands of Him who gave them, with cheerfulness; and can still praise Him though he sees fit to smite our choicest earthly comforts. It informs us whether we love God supremely, and can readily yield our present pleasures to advance his glory and honour.

Perhaps it is more difficult to suffer on Christian principles, than it is to be actively engaged in *doing good*; and if so, the more necessary and important will be the process by which we

* Prov. xxiii. 26.

may be taught to glorify God in suffering for his sake. Affliction accomplishes this object, since it teaches the necessity of cultivating, with the greatest care and diligence, those graces to which the heart is particularly averse, and especially those which interfere with our individual feelings, and spirit and temper.

Almost strangers to the exercise of humility, patience, resignation, or obedience, but for the goodness of God in afflicting us, it becomes us to rejoice even in tribulation, and to receive the chastisements of the Almighty with meekness and love. No trial or difficulty should destroy our trust in God: these are intended to confirm our faith and hope, that we may "be stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."*

"For this I say, time is short; it remaineth therefore, that they that have wives, be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; for the fashion of this world passeth away."† If, indeed, spiritual and eternal things were more distinctly seen, and impressively felt by us, we should walk more by faith, and less by sight. Faith is a

* 1 Cor. xv. 58. † Ibid. vii. 29.

noble and an animating principle; and whatever sacrifices of present enjoyment may be required by the means employed to generate or preserve this principle until it be ripened for immortality, and exchanged for the full fruition of God in heaven, we shall be gainers in the end: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."*

Grief silently but eloquently teaches the value of intercourse with God, and proves that strength and support are to be derived from communion with him. Intimate access to a compassionate Saviour is a balm for every sorrow: "Pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us."† We have access to him with boldness.

We are not only *allowed*, but encouraged, to speak all our mind to him. We are permitted to utter, and enlarge with unrestricted freedom upon every complaint, in the immediate presence of Him who numbers and keeps the tears of his children, and who delights to relieve and abundantly bless those that mourn. This is an unspeakable privilege, and it is enhanced by the promise that those who sow in tears shall reap

* Rom. viii. 18. † Ps. lxii. 8.

in joy. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart:"* and to those who continue waiting upon God, we may confidently expect the dawning of a brighter day. Already the light of the Sun of righteousness begins to irradiate the gloom, and the gladdening horizon will proclaim that *he* is risen with healing in his wings. Presently the dark clouds which now envelop you shall pass away; and your days shall be like "the clear shining of the sun after rain."—"Wait then upon the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord."†

It is well that we are not left to our own guidance, and that all events are entirely removed from the possibility of our controlling them in opposition to the will of God. For, so averse is the heart to the salutary though unpalatable discipline of suffering, that if we could escape the trials and the sorrows with which a kind Providence encompasses our path, we should eagerly adopt those measures which appear to promise an immunity from pain. Could we choose the sphere in which we would move, we should select a long and uninterrupted

* Ps. xcvii. 11. † Ibid. xxvii. 14.

series of present ease and temporal welfare; we should prefer a situation of respectability and affluence; and nothing but prosperous circumstances and unclouded prospects would enter into our calculation.

But our heavenly Father is too wise and good, to trust us with the disposal of ourselves. *He* knows our feeble frame, and in tender pity he appoints those chastisements, from which we indeed should shrink, but which are necessary for our present happiness and eternal welfare. *He* knows the temptations inseparably connected with a life of ease; and while we are sighing after riches, and honour, and prosperity, *he* is appointing us to live in poverty, obscurity, and affliction. It is most for his honour and our own good, that we should not move in the sphere on which we may have fixed our hearts, but which is thickly strewed with snares, and dangers, and temptations.

And, indeed, it pleased God to make the Captain of our salvation *perfect through sufferings.* In a most emphatic sense, the life of the Author of Christianity was a life of suffering: and *He* has left us an example of patience and obedience, while he has smoothed the rugged way, and divested it of its native terrors, by

having pursued this path to heaven, where he now sits enthroned in light which is inaccessible, and calls his people to follow him. And if they would be with him where he is, why should they hesitate to tread in his footsteps, or fear the thorny way? There is no affliction or privation which the Christian is called to suffer here, to which Jesus was a stranger; for he has "borne our griefs and carried our infirmities." Since it has pleased *the Father* to bruise him, who was his only-begotten Son, and who was especially the object of his tenderest regard, it is not surprising that his people should be called to share the same burden, nor that they should esteem it light, and easy to be borne.

Besides, He who knew the extremes of human woe, has promised (after they have suffered awhile) *rest for the weary:* he has invited the heavy-laden to himself, for he will give them peace and rest on earth by his presence, while he has prepared for them a crown of glory which fadeth not away, in the mansions of the blest. He knows that it is sin which invests affliction with its fearful aspect; and that this is the grand mean of discovering in the hearts of his children, the secret lurking-places and fastnesses of this cruel enemy. Were it not for the in-

fluence of sin over the heart, we should be enabled, in the exercise of faith, and hope, and patience, to rejoice in tribulation; we should no longer be averse to its corrective discipline, however painful; we should quietly rest ourselves in God, under every changing scene; we should rejoice in being counted worthy to suffer for his sake. But for the agency of sin, we should be bewildered by no clouded prospects, we should be harassed by no distressing doubts and perplexities; we should be agitated by no fearful retrospect; and we should be relieved from the recollection of mispent hours, cold affections, and innumerable wanderings from the rock of our salvation. These we contemplate as in a great degree the causes which have rendered necessary the affliction under which we suffer. Solid peace of mind will be thus obtained, in exchange for that feeble security which arises from distorted views of ourselves, our principles, and conduct, or from carelessness and neglect.

This tranquillity is confirmed by the augmented capacity of the mind for the enjoyment of the pleasures of religion. Suffering has an immediate tendency, not only to multiply the sources of our moral happiness; but to give

such an increased sensibility to the conscience, so much additional power of discrimination to the judgment, and of renewed fervour to the affections, that we become more careful in our walk and conversation, more heavenly-minded, more attached to the ways of religion and the oracles of divine truth; we increasingly fear sinning against God, and in walking more circumspectly we obtain peace.

When affliction accomplishes the design with which God has commissioned it, it produces repentance and contrition: for, "behold this self-same thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!"* In all this, it is evident, that repentance forms the groundwork of the superstructure, and that "godly sorrow" is the great end and design of sanctified affliction. It is sin alone which renders painful *that suffering* which is intended to discover to us its secret malignity and influence. We are probably by no means aware of its extent: we may be slumbering in placid ease, flattering ourselves that we are travelling with

* 2 Cor. vii. 11.

our faces towards a heavenly world, and preparing for its blest inheritance; while, in fact, we are unprofitable servants; while we come under the curse denounced against those who are "at ease in Zion;" while we are making no progress in the divine life, but are rather retrograde, than advancing day by day in the knowledge and love of God; while we are constantly deviating from the line of rectitude prescribed by the word of God, and while our hearts are estranged from the fountain of living waters, by a thousand cares and solicitudes.

But we are visited by affliction; we are brought acquainted with ourselves, and are obliged to fly for refuge to the only Source of real comfort; the visionary fabric of our own righteousness is dissipated, and we discover in our bosoms, instead of peace and holiness, nothing but folly, sin, and error. Our attention has been absorbed by objects of inferior importance, while we have scarcely fixed one wandering affection upon God. We find much sin, where we had fancied there existed little else than purity; and thus are we brought to repent and confess our sin to God, and to seek his pardon through the sacrifice of a crucified Redeemer. We are awakened from a state of lethargy as to our present and future

prospects, and oblivion of our past mercies, to a consciousness of our aberrations from God.

It is well to contemplate the gracious Dispenser of affliction, rather than refer its origin to those *secondary* causes which are governed by the *great First Cause.* While we confine our views to the events which have been appointed to accomplish the trials with which we are visited, we shall be involved in endless perplexities. We shall, perhaps, regret that our conduct has been instrumental in bringing about the very cause of our sorrow; and shall imagine a thousand neglected opportunities of having escaped the present source of our affliction. We shall be equally anxious to calculate the events to which this may give rise, to devise plans whereby we may avoid our burdens, and elude the consequences with which they are attended. Thus will the mind be harassed by care, so long as its finite views are engaged on the subject of its sorrow; but when we regard a gracious God accomplishing his designs in us, through the medium of his chastening providence, all is harmony and beauty. We admire his goodness in afflicting us, his compassion in soothing and alleviating our cares, his love in leading us to repentance, to a more intimate acquaintance with

Himself, and to a more complete knowledge of our own hearts.

Jehovah is our refuge and strength, when "the storm of the terrible ones is as a blast against the wall." We learn our own helplessness and dependence, and we come to him as the only source of consolation: we raise the half-expressed desire to heaven, and He is ready to attend unto our cry. In his own time, God will work deliverance for us, and he is willing to give us every consolation; to heal our backslidings, and afford us peace—a blessing infinitely greater than the possession we have lost, if *enjoyed* without the smiles of his reconciled countenance.

Affliction invites us to pray to God for support under our trials, and for their removal, when consistent with the will of their compassionate Author. If sorrow produces a good effect upon our hearts, and we derive any lasting advantage from suffering, one of the first lessons we shall learn, will be, the vanity and folly of looking to the creature for assistance and support, and the danger of placing our confidence in any thing short of the consoling presence of God. Our dearest earthly comforts are removed, and whither shall we go for consolation?

The *world* can offer no equivalent for our loss; it may indeed present its unmeaning condolence, it may invite us to join in its recreations, it may exhibit its pleasures as a source of peace. But if we are not yet throughly convinced of the emptiness of what the world calls pleasure, and the unsatisfactory nature of the happiness it affords, we shall now be taught this important lesson; for engaging in its proffered amusements, and tasting all the happiness it boasts, we may indeed feel its excitement for a time, but the result will be the dissipation of pain and mourning for a moment, only to recur with increasing violence from the exhaustion which the spirits have suffered, and from the conscious feeling, that *here* is no rest for the weary, no consolation for the distressed. We seek for peace, but there is none; for quietude, but it does, and in scenes like these ever will, elude our pursuit. Society will not tolerate the feelings of the mourner, it will not indulge his gloomy speculations. This would cast a chilling damp upon its gaieties, and mildew all its pleasures. In society, the sorrowful must be gay, and contribute his share to the general hilarity: this he cannot do; and the powers of his mind are enfeebled by the con-

tinued effort to wear a face of pleasure with a heart of pain.

Neither can he derive peace from pursuits of a literary nature. These may enliven his solitude, and cheer his darkest hours, when held in subservience to objects of greater importance. They present a fund of pleasure which will never cloy—an amusement which provides the capacity for its enjoyment, as well as the source whence it is derived; and which is constantly increasing with every fresh acquisition of knowledge. The mind of the man of taste is strengthened and refreshed by reading; and the sources of his pleasure are augmented by a thousand associations of which another is incapable: and the more amply this taste is indulged, the greater will be his sensibility, the more multiplied and lasting will be his gratifications. Yet these pursuits are insufficient; for the time will arrive when they can no longer be enjoyed: the mind becomes fatigued from constant exercise; it loses its elasticity, and consequent power of action, from unremitting exertion, and is no longer capable of receiving pleasure from its appropriate stimuli. A period of rest and relaxation is required, and where now will be found a refuge from the inroads of grief? What can quiet the

troubled bosom during the sleepless night? What can give peace to the agitated heart, through the wearisome days of indisposition; or divert those cares which rob the mind of its power to enjoy literary pleasure? Some other source of comfort must be devised; and yet there is none to which a rational being can resort for certain consolation. When his books fail of affording pleasure, (and they must fail from the alliance of the powers of the soul with mortality, and its consequent susceptibility of fatigue and exhaustion,) he has no refuge.

But the mourner may seek for happiness in the domestic pleasures which are still left him. And yet, with the late instructive lesson full in his memory, of the uncertainty of domestic happiness, it would be the extreme of folly to look for comfort from a source so frail, which a moment may destroy. Depending on the continuance of the slender thread of life, which the motion of an atom may divide, and on an absolute freedom, in the social circle, from the slightest cause of infelicity, the foundation of domestic happiness has been undermined: and when the sufferer reflects, that perhaps only yesterday he was gratulating himself on the unclouded sunshine of his days, cheered and animated by

that sun to his domestic system, which has now suffered an eternal eclipse, he cannot surely rest in this, as a source of consolation. He may indeed rejoice in the comforts he has left, but he will not seek them for solid peace of mind. Thus, is he taught the impossibility of the world's affording him happiness; he learns that the fascinating pursuits of literature will not procure his freedom from the inroads of care; and is guarded from estimating too highly, and placing his affections too intensely, on his yet remaining comforts.

Whither, then, must he flee for rest and peace! He is not left without comfort and without hope, destitute of support and consolation, a prey to hopeless sorrow! For there is a voice, saying, "I am with you always; I will not leave you comfortless. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you."* *Religion is the only source of solid peace.* When, and only when we enjoy these comforts, can we be happy in appealing to Heaven. Without a direct reference to the Holy Spirit the Comforter, as the author of serenity, we shall be unhappy: but if we trust in him alone for support, we shall be

* Matt. viii. 20. John xiv. 27.

little anxious about coming events, for we shall be possessed of that better part which can never be taken from us. Come, then, to this source of every blessing, and with humble faith implore the Divine Majesty for *rest in him;* pray for patience and resignation to his chastening hand, and entreat deliverance in his time only, and with entire submission to the guidance and disposal of Infinite Wisdom. Leaving yourself in his hands, you will be secure, your mind will be freed from corroding anxieties, and filled with that peace which passeth understanding.

Another important lesson may be derived from this affliction, viz. the folly of placing our dependence on earthly comforts, and seeking happiness from any objects which do not raise our thoughts and affections far beyond the present passing scene. We are feelingly reminded that the comforts we enjoy are not our own, that they belong to God, that they are the product of his bounty, and that as *He* is almighty to bestow his blessings, so he is *all-wise* to withdraw them for his own glory, or for our benefit. Mortality is stamped upon every enjoyment. A single moment may dissipate all our fairy scenes of happiness, and leave us without one ray of hope or comfort to be derived from inferior objects.

God is our refuge during the storms of sorrow; and since he is likewise the Author of every blessing, would it not be wiser to rejoice in *Him*, as our sun and shield, to protect us from danger during the hours of prosperity, and to guide our wandering feet?

If our affections were but fixed half so earnestly on the Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift, as they too frequently are exclusively on the gift itself, we should little fear the cares and troubles of life; and our happiness would be established on a basis which death itself could not impair. But until mortality shall be exchanged for everlasting life, we shall carry about with us the evil tendencies of the heart; and these will incline us from God, and fix our hearts on earthly objects and pursuits. Yet we should learn not to dote too intensely on the comforts we still enjoy, not to love these the more inordinately, because we have *fewer* objects to engage our attention; since this would be to defeat the great end of affliction, which is to wean our hearts from this world and its idols.

The human mind is naturally disposed to expand its feeble powers, in the exercise of benevolence to the creature simply, and to rest with

delight on the objects which immediately surround it, rather than on God. Nor is this surprising: for, to love those with whom reciprocal acts of kindness are exchanged, requires no effort: it is natural as to hunger or thirst; and the mind is restless and uneasy, unless engaged with its favourite pursuit. But to love God, and to prefer him, requires the habitual exercise of a superinduced principle, a principle of faith, a principle totally adverse to the bias of the human mind, and which grace alone can implant. God is a spirit; nor is it easy, till we love him in sincerity, to form just conceptions of Him who is infinite in holiness, power, and love: while the objects of earthly love are present to our senses, and thus acquire an ascendancy, a commanding influence over the heart, which aims to be progressively increasing, and would aspire to occupy the whole soul.

The world is the narrow circle in which we are appointed to move, from the circumference of which, every thought, feeling, and action should converge to God as its centre. We are too much disposed to fix the world as the centre, towards which all our desires and affections gravitate, and in which every thought and feeling, drawn from the circumference of action, should meet

and rest. We forget that the present is a season of preparation for a future state. We lose sight of the great design of living, the promotion of the glory of God, in the indulgence of selfish gratification: we forget that we are his creatures, and we live as if we formed ourselves, and were our own.

Even supposing we acknowledge our dependence upon God, his sovereign authority over us, his entire property in us, and that he is entitled to our supreme regards; yet we shall find, that prevailing earthly attachments exert an injurious influence over the mind. They dispute the possession of the heart with the Lord of Hosts, and challenge their full share of the affections. The Christian's love grows cold, and consequently his vitality inert. He is no longer active and zealous in the cause of religion, but imagines a thousand excuses for indolence: he is no longer diligent in the discharge of his duties, and lightly esteems the worship of the Most High. In secret, he is disinclined to inquire into his motives, and to examine the principles of his conduct; in his intercessions, he is lifeless and formal; his bosom is filled with worldly projects, and his time occupied with the selfish enjoyment of his unnumbered mercies. He forgets the hand which provides even these,

and looks no farther than to secondary causes as their origin. He seldom thinks about religion, and when he does, it is more as a matter of speculation, than as the grand pursuit of his whole life. He readily admits excuses for the dereliction of duty, and can scarcely find time for any engagement which does not directly or remotely tend to strengthen his attachment to earthly objects. He thinks, speaks, and acts, as a good citizen of this world, and not as one who is mindful of "that better country," to which it should be his great aim to hasten. Christianity may be kept alive in such a heart as this, but it cannot grow and flourish: it may, indeed, put forth the sickly leaves and variegated hews of profession; but it cannot produce good fruit to the praise and glory of God.

Heaven should be the Christian's home, and God the great source and object of his delight. The duties of religion should engage his whole soul; and its pleasures, its consolations, and its prospects, should so fill the heart, as to leave little room for the caprices of earthly love. Yet it is obvious that this is quite impossible, when the mind is fully occupied with the concerns, and the heart solely absorbed by the affections of mortality; and that in proportion as this is the

case, so will the growth and exercise of Christian principle be stunted and repressed.

Heaven-born Christianity cannot be made to flourish in an earthly soil. The warm hue of this sickly exotic proclaims that it is "ready to die," and that the only method of preserving its vitality, is to cut it down, and remove it to a situation more congenial with its nature. This is God's gracious design in sending affliction. As a tender husbandman, he looks upon every plant in his vineyard; he perceives that there are some which are sickly and unfruitful; yet he does not destroy them, but graciously removes the soil into which they have wandered, that by rooting more deeply in their native plain, and deriving their support from its pure source, they may bud, blossom, and bring forth fruit to his glory.

A compassionate Jehovah sees the injurious influence of creature attachments; and to warn us of our danger, he kindly takes away their object, and is thus pleased to weaken our interest on earth, and strengthen our desires after himself. He knows precisely where our affections are most deeply fixed: and as he will not tolerate a rival in our hearts, he beneficently removes the idol; and thus informs us at once, that we were inordinately attached to present scenes, declares

the sin for which he afflicts us, and invites us to himself as an all-sufficient portion. As our hearts become detached from earth, so will they be fixed in heaven; and thus every purpose is most kindly effected through the agency of sorrow. Divine goodness commissions affliction to divest the world of its enchantments, to unmask its delusive features, strip its pleasures of the glittering tinsel in which they are arrayed, disclose its real nature, and unveil its hidden deformities. We are enabled to look on its passing scenes with composure, and candidly to acknowledge its emptiness, its entire unworthiness of our affections. Our thoughts are abstracted from its vanities, and our conviction is deepened, of the infinite importance of eternal objects.

While suffering is rendered useful to convince the judgment, it is equally powerful to correct the heart, to restore its obliquities, and lead it to drink deeply of the spirit of the Saviour. This end is accomplished by discovering to us its corruptions, and their secret influence on the conduct of the life. During the halcyon days of prosperity, perhaps we made few inquiries concerning its state, we conceived all was going on well, because we were in peace, and we were

so dazzled by the brilliance of our prospects as to be unable to discern the deviations we had gradually, though insensibly, made from the narrow path of rectitude. But when we feel the weight of sorrow, we begin to scrutinize within; and we are struck by the existence of palpable deformities, which we had overlooked before, or even mistaken for excellencies. We become acquainted with ourselves, and with our distance from the pure standard of divine truth. We rise from these humiliating considerations, with mournful reflections on the past, but with fixed determination to oppose these very corruptions in the strength of divine grace; and are stimulated to seek after greater attainments of holiness, and to walk in the fear of the Lord.

It is justly observed in medicine, that the knowledge of a disease is more than half its cure. So it is with the mind. It will slumber in security, unconscious of evil; but when awakened by sorrow, it discovers the secret perversity of its actions, and is animated to oppose its wanderings. The principles of divine grace are called into more vigorous exercise: and as one deviation from the path of rectitude paves the way for another, and successively renders opposition to evil less and less energetic and effective, so will the

foundations of virtue be strengthened by exercise; the delusive flatteries of vice and of the world will each day exert an inferior influence; and at the same time, opposition to their power will be daily increased and rendered more successful, till it ripens into a habit, the involuntary product of an active principle, inwrought into the soul, and interwoven with the life.

Thus is the heart prepared for greater attainments in piety and knowledge, and strengthened to enjoy the smiles of prosperity without danger, and to encounter the frowns of adversity without dismay: whilst, by discovering how great are its propensities to evil, affliction excites a fear of offending God, and wandering from his way, and is admirably calculated to preserve the Christian from falling into the snares of his subtle adversary. He is taught to avoid whatever may have even a remote tendency to irritate his sorrow; he is desirous of not offending God, and therefore prays, and earnestly strives, to behave with meekness and gentleness, and submission to the will of Heaven.

Affliction is the means of perfecting the Christian's character: deprived of its animating influence, he would lose much of the worth of his greatest pleasures, and would be debarred

from attaining the most valuable principles. It is an affecting proof of the depravity of human nature, that we so frequently need this painful exercise, to remind us of our duties, and of our dependence upon God, to excite our diligence, and quicken our exertions in the cause of Christ, to teach us the important lesson of our mortality, and the necessity of being active while it is yet day, since the "night cometh, when no man can work."

It is a proof of the loving-kindness of God to his people, that when he sees them wandering from himself, the fountain of blessedness, he should graciously recall them: for he chastens us in love; his corrections are lighter than our sins; he compassionates our helpless condition; and, while he suits his mercies to our sorrowing state, he causes us to feel only just so much as will excite us to lift up our hearts to *Himself*. The wicked enjoy his common favours; but it is for the good that he reserves his choisest blessings, and particularly those of an afflictive nature. While "our Father which is in heaven," is governed as to the nature and weight of our trials, by the most enlarged affection, he has an especial regard to our good, since he administers a degree of correction commensurate with the

end to be accomplished: even to make us more wise, more humble, more holy, more teachable and childlike, more dependent upon him, more devoted to his service. He does not wantonly or unnecessarily inflict pain, but to quicken us in the exercise of faith, and hope, and every virtuous active principle. He would have us to know more of himself, and to grow in conformity with the image of our Redeemer. He wills that our understandings should be enlarged to see more beauty in the Saviour, that our hearts should be expanded, and our affections guided by his love; that our principles should be tried and established; and that the love of holiness should be more deeply written in our practice. He aims to make us active and zealous Christians, that we may show forth his praise, and prove the sincerity of our attachment to his cause.

This great end is accomplished by exciting in us an earnest diligence to search and try our hearts and thoughts, our dispositions and actions, and to see that they be right with God. This circumstance alone would render affliction unspeakably valuable; because it is only by a distant and confused view of our condnct, that we are so frequently deceived as to our motives

and principles: while we discover, on closer inspection, that these are very unlike what we had expected. From a distance we behold a lovely landscape, adorned with nature's richest attire; and we are induced to imagine that nothing but beauty and excellence can here be traced; that no venomous reptile lurks along the verdant plain; that no poisonous shrub grows unseen, beneath the protection of the stately oak; and that the stillness which reigns around is never interrupted by the accents of distress, but only by the soft murmurings of the distant stream.

In the dream of imagination, we conceive that happiness reigns in the sequestered cot, whose issuing smoke informs us of the abode of man; and that innocence and joy are alone inhabitants of this peaceful region. Yet how different, and how distant from the truth is this idea! A closer inspection will discover much to deplore—much to dislike. So it is with ourselves: we appear best, placed with our own features at a distance, while a more intimate acquaintance brings to our sight many an unsubdued passion, many a turbulent and sinful thought, many an earthly bias, and a thousand evils which would have escaped unseen, but for

the afflictive event which has induced us to look within our own bosom, and to seek acquaintance with our own hearts. Perhaps much thoughtlessness and levity have hitherto marked our conduct; and that cheerfulness which the genius of Christianity demands, has too frequently degenerated into an offensive inconsideration. Affliction tends to weaken the influence of this failing, and to show us the value of sobriety and vigilance.

If we bear correction as we ought, if we are desirous of reaping the benefit intended by God, we shall be brought to inquire into his design: and besides, the necessary consequence of this trial, and its attendant temporary abstraction from our customary pursuits, is, that we are obliged to commune with our own hearts; and it is almost impossible not to be engaged on such occasions with the most serious thoughts. Nor can we again very readily lose the impression; we carry it along with us into the world, and our whole conduct and intercourse with *it* is tinged with seriousness, not with the mere influence of depressed spirits, not with the simple feeling of our present loss, nor with the moroseness of the solitary, but with serious cheerfulness, arising on the one hand from a view of the importance of

affliction, and on the other, from reflection on the consoling ray with which Christianity cheers and illumines our prospects.

Affliction, when it is well sustained, affords the means of improving every part of the Christian character. It is a discipline which, by pruning redundancies, discovering and healing diseases, and exciting and encouraging languid actions and dormant principles, diffuses its influence over the heart, and consequently shows itself in the life, in more correct and energetic practice, more diligence, more of the Christian spirit, and of resemblance to the Christian's great and perfect Exemplar, more entire devotedness to the service of the Most High.

The great design of the Christian's life should be to promote the glory of God, and extend the limits of his kingdom. And yet how feeble his exertions! how cold and lifeless his endeavours, how inadequate to the magnitude of the design to be accomplished! There is none who does all that he might and ought to do in this great cause: and how many are content to hide their talent in a napkin, to sepulchrate their influence, and to attempt nothing towards the attainment of an object so magnificent!

Affliction, by promoting a habit of self-inspec-

tion, produces a conviction of our unprofitableness, leads us to set a greater value on religion, and to venerate more highly its gracious Author: whilst by teaching us the vanity and insufficiency of the joys and prospects of the present life, it weans our hearts from the world, enfeebles our attachment to its scenes, brings to our views the crown of joy reserved in heaven for those who love and serve God; and thus has a direct tendency to elevate our thoughts above the feelings and maxims of the day, and teaches us to seek guidance and direction from the God of all grace, with the humble desire of being entirely devoted to his service.

In the exercise of this principle we are not simply desirous of being employed actively in the execution of his purposes: but if he pleases to place us in obscurity, to thwart our schemes of active duty, and to try the fixedness of our trust in him, by requiring us to surrender, not only ourselves, but all our concerns, all we are, and have, and think, and feel, and do, to his will, we are prepared to yield submissively to his disposal. There can be no such thing as reservation here; God will have the whole heart, and will not endure its partition by a rival.

This devotedness of the heart to God is not

an occasional impulse, but a constant principle of action; it does not consist in any outward sign, which may be assumed to-day, and laid aside to morrow; it does not extend to one part of the conduct only, while the rest is tinctured with the wild impulse of ungoverned passion; it does not show itself in some particular instances, while the general disposition of the mind is averse to God; but it produces consistency of conduct and of feeling: it implies and gives such a degree of firmness and of fixedness to the character, as to lead its aspirations more habitually to heaven, to prepare the Christian for every event, and to enable him to praise God, and to walk continually with him.

If such be the advantages of sorrow, who would not "choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season?"* Who would not deliberately prefer suffering, with all its inestimable benefits, to a life of ease and security, and present uncertain pleasure? Inasmuch as eternity is longer than time, the doctrines of Christianity are to be preferred to the maxims of the world, and "the sufferings of this present time, which are but for a moment, work out

* Heb. xi. 25.

for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;"* so is affliction to be preferred as the means of preparing us for heaven, and exciting us to love Him in whose favour is life, and whose service is perfect freedom. If we "endure patiently," we shall inherit the promise: forgetting this world and its allurements, we shall be quickened in our progress towards heaven, and stimulated to lay up our treasures *there*, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt nor thieves break through and steal.

How carefully should we pray and strive after a proper improvement of sorrow, that this may prove a source of consolation, and of joy unspeakable and full of glory, in the anticipation of being soon landed on the blissful shores of immortality! Whilst, however, we reflect with delight on the advantages to be derived from the influence of affliction, we must not forget the guilt we shall incur, if we despise this abundant source of blessing—if we neglect its warnings, and are heedless of the instruction it affords. No benefit will accrue from suffering, if it be not improved. Then, indeed, affliction would be unspeakably painful:—we should suffer equally, and, perhaps, more, without any title

* 2 Cor. iv. 17.

to the consolations provided for those who mourn in Zion, and at the same time we should incur the just anger of God, in refusing to listen to his voice, and to come to him, that "we might have life." If the affliction under which we groan do not detach us from the world—if it do not weaken the influence of sin, and invigorate the principle of piety in our hearts, we lose a blessing, "which is better than riches: and all the things that may be desired, are not to be compared with it."*

* Prov. iii. 15.

CHAPTER V.

ON SELF-EXAMINATION.

If the influence of affliction be thus extensive, and its advantages so important; if our eternal welfare be connected with its improvement; and if there be a danger of foregoing these advantages, it is necessary to ascertain, whether we are *reaping the instruction designed by this mournful event.* To rest in uncertainty where the interests of eternity are concerned, is irrational; and at this season of solitude, the inquiry well befits us, What are we the better for our sorrows?—A mistake on this subject may be of infinite consequence; and, therefore, the greatest care and diligence should be observed in the scrutiny.

If it be true, that the foundation of all useful knowledge must be laid in an acquaintance with ourselves; and if it be granted, that we are

indisposed to the fulfilment of this duty, because it leads us to be dissatisfied with our actions; it is the more necessary that we seriously prosecute the inquiry as in the presence of Him who searches the hearts and tries the reins of the children of men; and that we do not cease to examine ourselves, while we entertain a doubt of the integrity of our conduct.

He who is a God of love does not willingly afflict his people: infinite wisdom and infinite goodness influence his decisions, and his decrees are executed with an especial regard to mercy. Hence, there can be no question but that the present scene of distress is commissioned to accomplish some *wise purpose*; and perhaps, by a little attention, it may not be difficult to discover the particular design.—Yet, if this were not the case, when we look into our hearts, and observe so much evil constantly springing up; when we detect so much attachment to the world, and alienation from God; we cannot be at a loss to perceive the necessity for some great change, that we may be made holy and acceptable in his sight.

"Wherefore should a living man complain? —a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again

to the Lord."* This is precisely the frame of mind in which we should meet affliction. Conscious of our sinfulness and manifold infirmities, that we deserve to suffer the wrath of God, and that it is of his infinite mercy we are yet the living to seek him, we should not venture to approach him with complaints. We should be humbled under the mighty hand of God, and be stimulated to inquire, whether *we* have chosen the Lord as *our* God; and if so, wherein we have deviated from his ways, that we may turn unto him with the whole heart.

"Show me wherefore thou contendest with me,"† should be the language of our minds. We may not rest contented with a general acknowledgement of our sinfulness; nor be satisfied with a cold and languid confession of our hardness of heart, and of our proneness to wander from God. This, alas! is too frequently the mind's subterfuge, to escape that piercing scrutiny which will reveal what is wished to be forgotten: it is an attempt to lose in generalization the peculiar features of the present trial.

God afflicts his children only when chastisement is *most* required; and hence we may often

* Lam. iii. 39, 40. † Job x. 2.

discover in the *nature* of the trial, an indication of its *design*, and of *the evil to which it is opposed*. Self-examination, in proportion as it brings us acquainted with our own hearts, leads us to entertain higher thoughts and juster conceptions of the majesty, power, and goodness of God. We can no longer allow the intrusion of doubt respecting his wisdom, mercy, or love, because we find so much that is averse from him, and hateful in his sight. We can enumerate so many provocations against his glorious majesty, so many offences against his patience and forbearance, and such a distance from the standard of purity he has exhibited for our imitation, that we are constrained to acknowledge the justice of his displeasure, his wisdom in correcting us, that he may recall our wandering footsteps to his ways, and supply us with the consolations of his grace.

We are placed in the world, in a situation of trial and of danger, in the midst of our fellow-creatures, in the relation of social beings; and we have all some part or other to perform on this wide theatre. Since we are naturally attracted by the present scenes, and necessarily and lawfully engaged in our several stations, it is useful to examine, whether we have estimated the

world and its possessions in a proper light, or whether, on the contrary, these have not occupied too much of our time, and pre-engaged our thoughts.

We are commanded to be "active in business," but at the same time fervent in spirit; and it is obvious that a degree of diligence in the former, which interferes with the right performance of religious duties, and infringes on the time allotted for the peculiar service of God, or which renders us unfit for the exercise of that worship which should be our delight, must be proscribed. Excessive anxiety about the cares and pursuits of this life, is an insurmountable barrier to the maintenance of vital religion in the heart. Worldly solicitude slowly preys upon the spirits, and, by depressing the powers of the mind, prevents its looking up to God, and deriving its happiness from his service. It securely takes its root in the very basis of the heart: there it vegetates, and sends forth its shoots: these grow and entwine themselves around its surface, till at length they meet and inosculate, and thus repress its few and feeble efforts to send one lingering wish on high.

This effect will be produced, when present anxiety is suffered to oppress the mind, and ob-

scure its perceptions; when the soul no longer feels the delight which it once experienced, in contemplating the wonders of God's providence, and tracing his gracious and affectionate hand in all the acts of his goodness, and is incapable of appreciating the value of his preserving and sustaining mercy. When the mind ceases to contemplate these interesting scenes with pleasure, and is absorbed with worldly projects and desires, then it is, that, no longer directed to their proper object, the affections wander from God: they diverge from their native centre, and they fall irregularly on some *inferior object;* inasmuch as any thing short of the goodness and the majesty of heaven is undeserving supreme regard. The views are no longer directed towards the skies; but, on the contrary, the distant glimpses which are caught at intervals of a world to come, are illuminated only by the feeble, glimmering, and uncertain light of reason; the desires are faint and languid; the heart no longer beats responsive to the stimulus it should receive from contemplating the love of God; while all its powers, and energies, and activity, are concentrated on some present good of little real value.

Perhaps, too, we may be pursuing an un-

lawful object: not only one which absorbs our thoughts and affections, but which engages them in direct hostility to the commands of God. We are heaping up riches, and may be little scrupulous about the means of obtaining them, while God says, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal."* While he commands us to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," we lose sight of these grand objects, and pursue the attainment of present good—riches, honour, or reputation.

This injurious influence exerted upon the heart is visible in the life. We have no longer Christianity in its lovely, active form. There is, indeed, a name to live, but there is no vitality. The character, the hopes, the joys, the principles, and the prospects of the aspirant of heaven, are merged in the undefined and cloudy views of the man of the world. The present world is his element: in it he lives, and breathes, and acts; but take him from his busy scenes to his chamber, how cold his heart; how feeble,

* Matthew vi. 19, 20, 33.

formal, and unfelt are his addresses to the God of grace; how diminutive his exertions in the cause of religion, when contrasted with his general activity! His conduct is influenced, not by the pure standard of divine truth, but by worldly maxims, and motives of expediency and policy, while it ceases to be characterized by that genuineness of principle which distinguishes the activity of the humble follower of Jesus.

This state of mind is hateful to God, who wills that his creatures should live as candidates for a future, better world, and should show forth his glory on earth. And yet, so insidious is its attack, so measured and cautious are its approaches, that the mind may be wholly preoccupied with the world, before we are sensible of having lost our first love. Can there be a question, then, of the necessity of self-examination, that we may ascertain whether we have declined from the ways of God, and have turned aside to other paths? If this be our case, it becomes us to balance the pleasures and pursuits of this life with the favour of heaven, and ask whether the former are deliberately to be preferred? In a season of affliction, we shall assuredly answer in the negative; and thus shall we learn the relative value of present and eternal considerations; we

shall discover our own unhappy choice; we shall repent, remember whence we are fallen, and, in the strength of divine grace, we shall do "the first works."

But, again, are our attachments fixed on things above, or upon things on the earth? Man is a rational being; but he is so situated in this world, that the great basis of his happiness is made to consist in the exercise of the social affections. The Almighty has beneficently implanted in his breast a desire to promote the happiness of those who are dear to him, and has imparted to this principle such a degree of influence over his conduct, that it gives a peculiar character to his actions. As the mind expands, the benevolent sympathies are evolved; during a state of infancy their influence is circumscribed; but soon the exercise of filial, strengthened by fraternal love, is expanded into the fulness of that benevolence which stamps the mind with peculiar beauty and excellence. Allowed, however, to range through the wide field of knowledge and of society, there are some objects, which by possessing a greater number of affinities with his character, will necessarily attract and engage the attention more than others, and finally enlist

the heart in the choice. Hence the origin of friendship and love; and of that delight which arises from the communion of kindred souls, in pursuit of the same great objects, and guided by the same immutable principles.

While the affections, when rightly directed, may lead us to greater activity in the service of morality and religion; so it must be confessed, that they have a natural tendency to pre-occupy the heart, and abstract its allegiance from God. Though just and pure in themselves, yet, by aiming no higher than their *immediate object*, they become so concentrated upon it, as to be very little capable of more extensive and exalted action, and often prove the means of alienating the heart from the pursuit of virtue. But God is a jealous God; and as the supreme good, he requires our hearts to be placed on him, and is angry when they are directed from him. He will not tolerate a rival in our bosoms, and if we inordinately love the creature, we put this object in the room of the Creator; we substitute an idol for the true God, and worship with our hearts, a poor imperfect creature, whose every excellence is *derived* from the infinitely just and holy God.

As God demands the heart, and is provoked

when it is bestowed upon another; so he is sometimes induced to remove from our sight the endeared object which has thus proved the occasion of weaning us from himself, instead of exciting our gratitude towards him. Has this been the case with us? Has not the beloved object of our fond solicitude proved the occasion of dividing our hearts, and abstracting our thoughts and affections from pursuits of infinite and supreme importance? Have we not rested in the pleasantness and excellence of the gift, while we have forgotten from whom it was derived? Have we not been overwhelmed with anxiety for its welfare? Have we not made the enjoyment of its society our home—our refuge? When care and sorrow have invaded our bosoms, have we not sought the oblivion of our grief in the delightful intercourse of chastened affection? yea, has not our happiness consisted in this, while we have forgotten to choose God as our portion, to seek his guidance, and come to him as our only substantial good? The continuance of present scenes has been all our desire; we have felt as if nothing could blast our happiness or destroy our pleasures. Yet God has shown us that we are in his hands; he has smitten our pleasant

flower, and dissipated all our fairy scenes of present peace.

And has not his conduct in this instance been marked by merciful loving-kindness? He is teaching us that no lasting happiness is to be found on earth, and that heaven alone is our home. He perceives that we are satisfied with our present comforts, and wisely directs the removal of these intervening objects, in order that we may practically learn the transitory, fleeting nature of terrestrial joys, and be constrained to place our hopes above. Earnestly then should we strive to reap the benefit of the lesson thus painfully inculcated.

In the present dark and clouded season, every object will assume an appearance differing from its late fascinating hue. A tender father is manifesting the insufficiency of this world to satisfy the desires of an immortal mind! You expand your heart, and place your affections on the creature of a day; but in an unexpected moment, death snatches away your dearest friend, and you are convinced of the futility of expecting abiding felicity from any object so uncertain in its continuance. While you enjoyed its presence, you wished for nothing more; but you now find a void, which no recollection of past

happiness can fill; and you are driven to seek from some other source, the solid peace you have lost. Thus, while you learn the incapacity of the creature, to make you substantially happy, you are instructed in the all-sufficiency of a Saviour; for, even under these distressing circumstances, he is present with you; he puts underneath you his everlasting arms; he offers himself to your acceptance as a God of mercy and love; and he invites you to put your whole trust in him. Exquisitely dear to the heart as is the recollection of past scenes of love, yet they will now appear as mispent hours, because they have induced you to neglect the Lord your God; and the more poignant your grief, the greater will be your desire to live in future to his glory.

There is no dividing the heart between *God* and his *gifts;* you cannot at the same time love both the one and the other supremely. The human heart is so *formed*, or perhaps characterized by its fallen state, that it would aim to share its powers between God and the creature: but it is impossible. If the latter be loved *equally*, it will be loved superlatively. The only chance of safety is when love to the creature is entertained in direct subservience to the will of God. If, then, by this self-inspection,

we learn the inordinate wanderings of present affection, we shall be desirous of transferring all the love which we once sinfully placed on our lost relative, to the Saviour, who is the fountain of all goodness; we shall be desirous of seeking him, as the supreme object of our delight, and shall earnestly pray for the assistance of his Spirit, to enable us to choose him as our chief good, and our all-sufficient portion.

This is not a place of rest. Hitherto, we have derived our happiness from terrestrial comforts; we have calculated on their continuance, and we have wished no change: we have fondly imagined that the late happy scenes would not be dissipated till a period most remote, and we have been contented to seek no other home. The integral beauties of the domestic small but perfect circle, have been our paradise of earthly bliss. Here we have enjoyed all that heart could wish, or a fond imagination realize, when depicting its fairy prospects of felicity; and we have forgotten that this is but the journey to an eternal world, or that we are travellers to a heavenly state. We have slumbered on the lap of ease, and our life has been but as a dream of perfect pleasure; we are now awakened to the consciousness of our delusion; and while we

regret the visionary fabric that has passed away, we are forcibly reminded of its original instability and emptiness: we estimate these only as they deserve, we find mutability stamped on every thing human, and our only hope of tranquillity is derived from seeking an acquaintance with that everlasting blessedness of the righteous, which we should be preparing to enjoy. When we look at the Christian, and recollect that it should be his delight to be conformed to the image of his Redeemer; when we remember, that in this world the Son of Man had not where to lay his head, that he was despised and rejected of men, and forsaken even by his disciples in the hour of peril; surely we should be ashamed of assuming this for our resting-place, when we should be striving to inherit his kingdom, and to be with him where he is, there to behold his glory!

Again; the great God, who first breathed into man the spirit of life, who endowed him with rational faculties, and gave him an immortal soul, has conferred upon each one of his creatures some varied and peculiar talents, which, in their different measures, all are directed to improve, and exercise in his service, and to his honour: the greater, therefore, our talents, the

greater will be the sin of perverting or neglecting them.

If we possess talents, and are indifferent to their cultivation and employment, we are unprofitable servants; and if we pervert them by lending their influence to the cause of sin and error, we are doubly criminal; for it is hardly possible to calculate the extent of the injury thus inflicted on the interests of truth. There is a serious responsibility attached to the exercise of talent; and since its effects are so extensive and remote, and its perverted influence so destructive, it behoves us to inquire, if we are free from the charge of negligence or inattention. Perhaps our ability may be small: yet each in his appropriate sphere possesses an important power of good or evil. If this influence be duly exerted, its exercise will be guided by a prevailing desire to extend the knowledge of God, and promote the glory of his kingdom. It will be contemplated as a sacred deposit, which we should diligently employ in accomplishing this great end, in so far as our ability may extend. To advance the interests of morality and civil order, will surely never be forgotten, though it may be esteemed as a secondary object, and arising out of the former.

Where genuine religion is implanted in the heart, morality follows necessarily as its fruit; and hence our great concern will be to promote its best interests in the world. Yet the present comforts of mankind at large, will not be overlooked. Benevolence opens a wide sphere for action; and though we may regret the limited means with which we are endowed, yet we shall be constantly devising new plans of usefulness, and seeking new evils to be remedied, new sorrows to be alleviated, and new blessings to be conferred. Real charity does not derive a motive to inactivity, from the contemplation of what has been effected through its influence; but every renewed exercise of the principle gives it additional energy, and a consequent increased power of action, while it gradually, but invariably, forms the mind to habits of benevolence. It will never rest satisfied with the exertions of yesterday, while the activity of to-day can, by the remotest possibility, contribute to the happiness or welfare of one other object.

The glory of God, the advancement of his kingdom, and the good of mankind in its largest acceptation, will be the points towards which the exercise of talent should converge. And the motive should be disinterested. The love of

applause, or the desire of power, must be disallowed, and combated, as principles of action: while the love of Christ should constrain, and animate us with affection to his people, and furnish abundant incentives to activity. We often do right; we exert our talents to the utmost, in a good, nay, in the very best of causes, but perhaps from unworthy motives. If we do not hope to obtain the love and esteem of the world, yet the influence we fondly anticipate over our little social circle, is often too attractive to be resisted. In this scrutiny of the heart we cannot be too rigid; for it is the motive which characterizes the act, and not the act itself, the source from which it springs. This indeed may appear pure to others, and yet may be the most contaminated. We must investigate the motive and the aim of our conduct; and if, in the exercise of talents entrusted to us, conscience will approve both the former and the latter; if we are satisfied, that there is no abuse of the influence we have exerted; we have still to ask, whether we have done so much as we ought, whether we have done so much as we could, and have been as diligent and active as our situation has demanded. It will be well indeed for us, if we have not to lament the improper use of our capa-

city to do good; but we can hardly expect to be able justly to acquit ourselves of neglect, of inattention to opportunities of exertion, and of the want of purity in our motives. Affliction detects the lurking evil, and discovers abundant cause for the judgments of God inflicted on us.

This afflictive providence leads us still further to inquire into our habitual preparedness for death, and the solemn realities it will disclose. Mankind in general look around them; and in the circle of their acquaintance, many, one after another, are taken away: the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the just and the unjust, are alike the subjects of mortality. Those with whom we have associated to-day, are no more seen in their accustomed situations: others succeed them: and perhaps even this generation passes away, and yet man is unmindful of his approaching end. Among those who survive, the ravages of disease are evident, and we see some maintaining a lingering existence, whom we certainly calculate on soon consigning to the tomb. Yet we forget that we must follow them. We are unwilling to live in the constant recollection of the uncertainty and brevity of human life, and we are naturally inclined to postpone the cer-

tain approach of death to a very distant, and yet more distant day.

"Man, that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth as a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not."* Human life, indeed, is aptly compared to a flower: it flourishes in all the pride of youth and beauty; and as it advances to maturity, promises to disperse its fragrance and its charms to a widely extended circle. We gaze and admire, as it expands its freshening beauties, and we fervently pray that nothing may impair its vigour or arrest its growth. But we are soon painfully taught the rapidity of its progress. For, while our hearts kindle into contemplation on the coming prospects and anticipated pleasures which promise to attend its full-blown sweetness, it has passed at once to a state of decay. A few days only are allotted for the completion of this process; and it is uncertain, whether even these few days may be accomplished. For a nipping frost has chilled its powers. the pelting of the untimely wintry storm has stripped it of its vitality and beauty; or the destructive worm has slowly but effectually preyed upon its

* Job xiv. 1, 2.

roots, destroyed its healthy active hue, substituted the wan character of disease, and now it "fleeth as a shadow, and continueth not."

Human life is indeed promising at its outset, but it is rapid in its progress and uncertain in its duration. Yet, in entire forgetfulness of the testimony of the Sacred Writings, the evidence of our observation, and the undisputed fact, that a very large majority of mankind die in the most promising period of human existence, in childhood and youth, we cannot be practically convinced of our own mortality. But death has now invaded our own immediate circle, it has removed from our sight one in whom we delighted, and on the protraction of whose days we securely calculated, and even fondly built the realization of all our future scenes of happiness. we have lost the friend, without whom the domestic circle will be incomplete; and this event has occurred in a most unexpected moment. Surely, then, it becomes us to obtain a deep conviction of the uncertainty of life, practically to entertain the idea of our own approaching mortality, to put the question, "Am I also ready?" and to seek after a constant preparation for this great change.

Yes! we are mortal; nor can we possibly postpone the appointed hour of dissolution. Sooner or later, and we know not how soon, we shall be called to leave this world for another. A few days, perhaps only a few hours since, our dear friend was in perfect health, cheering and cheered by our mutual intercourse; and though fully prepared for this awful sudden change, little dreamt that the messenger of separation was so near at hand. Instead of his removal, the summons might have been made to the survivor; and are you equally ready to meet your God? No man knows the time or the manner of his death; it is a wise provision, that we remain ignorant of its approach: but, since it may come as a thief in the night, and as the sick bed is not the place for repentance, when the mind is clouded by disease, and its perceptions too frequently distorted; if we would wish to die in peace, and in the assured hope of a happy resurrection, we should have our prospects for eternity clear and well defined, during a state of health; we should be watching for the coming of the Lord, and be prepared to yield ourselves into the arms of the Redeemer of sinners:—*thus to die is infinite gain.*

Should death be the only circumstance we

do not anticipate, the only journey for which we are careless of our safety and comfort, the only important vicissitude which claims no regard? Surely, this is not the part of prudence. May we be no longer unmindful of its approach, but earnestly inquire, if our lights are burning, and our lamps trimmed; and if not, may we diligently prepare them, and stand having our "loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."*

Christianity is a vital animating principle, and it is highly important for us to know whether its influence is really extended over our hearts and lives, or whether we merely profess a belief in its truth, while our temper, our feelings, and our conduct, remain unaffected by its influence.

* Eph. vi. 14—18.

The external profession of religion in the present day is very common; I had almost said, it has become *fashionable*; at all events, it is not now that *strange thing*, which once subjected its friends to reproach and persecution. It would indeed be uncharitable and unjust, to deny the rapid increase of vital religion; but at the same time, as the stream has widened it has become shallower: and as difficulties have been removed, so has arisen the temptation to choose its flowery banks, from custom and habit, early prejudice, or perhaps interested motives. These, and a thousand causes such as these, may induce us to take up our lot with the disciples of Christ, while it is yet evident that we have no title to true religion. Our attendance upon the worship of God, reverence for the Sabbath, activity in promoting the progress of religious truth, and choosing other professors as our companions and friends, do not prove that we are sincerely desirous of being taught of God, and influenced by his Spirit to purity of action. Yet on these grounds we may be seeking repose, and lulling our consciences into security, while we should be tremblingly alive to the dangers of our situation. The peaceful but lifeless professor is in greater danger than the avowed profligate, since the ave-

nues of his heart are closed to the importunities of divine truth.

But if it be thus easy to mistake on the ground of a sincere reception of Christianity, it is even more so, to impose on the heart, by the external propriety of our conduct. We may rest for safety on the purity of our lives, on our charity and good works: or we may err equally on the opposite side of the question; for, as faith without works is dead, so good works, if they do not proceed from correct motives, are the body without the soul: they want the vital principle which stamps them with value.

Simple morality does not, cannot comprehend the *whole* scheme of Christianity. It can effect much in ameliorating the temper and correcting the life; but it can *never change the heart;* it can never induce holy principles, nor originate *good actions*, springing from *pure motives*, and having a direct tendency to raise the thoughts to heaven, or the affections to God. Affliction unmasks these errors: for it finds us destitute of the consolations of religion, a principle, which having never vegetated in our bosoms, cannot therefore produce its *fruits:* if we attempt to look back on our past lives, we find so much evil, that we cannot derive comfort from

the retrospect; and even if we could, this would fail of imparting peace under circumstances so distressing.

Perhaps we have no concern about religion, and are looking to the world, to philosophy, and a thousand false hopes, for consolation in the hour of trial. Diligent self-inspection will discover our error, show us that we are seeking comfort where none is to be found, point to the only real source of happiness, and induce a conviction of our own helplessness, and of the suitableness of a Saviour's grace, to supply our wants, to lead us from darkness to light, and from self-reliance to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and finally bring us to inherit a crown of glory which fadeth not away.

The Christian will be anxious to inquire if he has embraced *the whole of Christianity*, and if its principles produce their legitimate influence on his heart and life. When he is chastened, he will suspect some secret evil, and desire to be brought acquainted with it, and enabled to resist it in the strength of divine grace. His principles are put to the test. Do they now afford him consolation and support? Do they enable him to be meek, patient, and submissive, and lead him to dependance upon

God? It is highly important that his views should be well-defined, his hopes brightened by truth, his prospects fixed on eternity, and all his principles extracted simply from the Bible. This must be his last appeal, his counsellor, his best and constant friend.

Christianity is not a revelation, from which we may cull for our reception and obedience, such parts as are most congenial to our feelings: but the *whole* truth must be received from the heart, as a perfect rule of life, an unerring guide through every difficulty, and the immutable standard of opinion and action. We cannot retain one of its doctrines, while we reject the rest: we cannot yield obedience to some of its precepts, while we are habitually negligent of others. We may not forget the self-denial it enjoins, nor the rigid activity in the service of God which it requires, while we receive the security it offers both now and hereafter, to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We may not lose sight of the good works it enforces, while we rest our faith on the promises it contains. We may not separate the practice from the principle, nor the principle from the practice.

We must be careful that the principles we

have imbibed, are drawn from this pure source; and that they are unadulterated by any modification of human invention. These principles must be examined, and their efficacy must be proved. Whilst the Christian is led to God, in the exercise of humble prayer by the contemplation of his own sinfulness, and the suffering he endures, he will yet wait with patience, assured that, in his own good time, God will work deliverance; or, if this be impossible, that he will grant what is infinitely more valuable, the sanctification of the affliction. We must not be weary in waiting upon God. Though he does not answer our petitions immediately; or though, in infinite wisdom, he does not see fit to grant the requests of short-sighted mortality; yet he may bless us, in some other way of far greater importance. If we are purified, and sublimed, and prepared for heaven, are we not abundantly benefited?

This consideration will induce the mourner to remember his past sufferings, and to inquire what good he has derived from those afflictive events which are now past, and from that under which he at present labours. Have trials, commissioned by the long-suffering mercy of a compassionate God, produced their proper effect in making him more holy and heavenly-minded, more

afraid of sin and more desirous of living to his glory? Perhaps, he can look back on past scenes of sorrow, with bitter recollection, on hours of suffering misimproved, and talents perverted. Perhaps he will lament the little fruitfulness which has sprung from this beneficent culture; and to his present sorrow will be added the aggravation, of having trifled with the Most High; of having suffered, yet without advantage. If this be the case, he will be doubly anxious to reap the benefit of present affliction; and he will obtain a fresh and powerful motive to self-inspection. He will be assured that the Lord doth all things well, and will be concerned that he still needs this discipline to wean him from the earth, and fix his attachments on heaven; he will regret that he has made so little progress towards the celestial kingdom; and he will be desirous of having his pace quickened, and of acquiring a new, and powerful, and lasting stimulus to diligence and exertion.

But there are dangers and errors, attending even this process of self-examination, which it will be right to keep in view, or we may arrive at false conclusions; and with all our scrutiny, and all our sorrow, derive no advantage from either.

So great a flatterer of its thoughts and actions is the human heart, that there is no inconsiderable danger, lest we be induced, with specious self-complacency, to proclaim to ourselves, "Peace, peace, where there is no peace."* The principle of self-love is of all others the most intimately interwoven with our nature; it is almost the first stimulus to action, and it lends its characteristic influence to the whole of our conduct. Under one or other of its ever varying forms, it is perpetually exhibited in our lives, and affords its peculiar bias to our opinions, while it confirms the habits and strengthens the prejudices we have entertained, and thus presents an obstacle to the discovery of truth, lest we become acquainted with the unwelcome fact, *that hitherto we have been in error.* Its immediate influence is to reconcile us to ourselves, and to make us well pleased with what we are, rather than with what we ought to be.

The discovery of the unbounded influence of this principle will humble us, will assist in preserving us from error, and, by laying open to our view the secret wickedness of the mind, will prove that the heart is "deceitful above all

* Jer. vi. 14.

things, and desperately wicked;"* that it "is prone to evil, and that continually:" and that nothing short of divine power can effect a change. This will induce us to look from ourselves to the Author of all good for wisdom and strength; and while we would desire to maintain a constant warfare with evil, we shall still be expecting support from him; since it is only in his strength that we can obtain a victory. It is by his grace we shall escape the delusions of sin and error, and it is only by his power we can be preserved from falling.

In this trial we shall need a standard of purity, that we may compare the actual state of our bosoms, with the principles, the feelings, and the actions which should constitute the Christian character. But this standard must not be of our own selection, or we should accommodate the test to our peculiar views: we are too apt at all times to frame systems, and to make facts and opinions subservient to their support; and when so materially interested, it would not be surprising if we adopted a mode of comparison so congenial with our prejudices.

Neither must we adopt a standard of purity which the world has selected; since this will

* Jer. xvii. 9.

be ever varying according to the deepening shades of error, which encompass the votaries of fashion, and, at the bidding of the thoughtless and the gay, will be easily moulded by circumstances, and will assume almost any shape and form, and length and breadth, which convenience may require.

But moral rectitude is unchangeable and unaccommodating. It is the same to-day as a thousand years ago; it is the same under every circumstance; nor can it sustain the smallest alteration in its nature, without suffering a proportionate loss. We look in vain for some unerring guide: we cannot find it in ourselves, nor in the maxims of the world, nor in the sublime ethics of philosophy. The only true standard is the Holy Scripture, and it is by its precepts we must investigate our hearts. Here we shall find an estimate of purity the most sublime, a tone of morality the most exalted, principles the most refined, and precepts the most beneficent and engaging. We shall not be lulled into security by false opinions and distorted maxims; but the way of truth will be so plain, that we cannot mistake; so pure, that we cannot be deceived. It is the motive which characterizes the act; a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good

fruit: and thus are we led to the source of the evil, and to the only possibility of cure, in a new heart and a right spirit, which are the gift of God. We have no longer any excuse for wandering in the dark; "a light" is provided "for our feet, and a lamp unto our paths;" if we are in a state of uncertainty, here we may be directed into the way of all truth, the way which leads to present peace and everlasting happiness. To this standard alone, we must accommodate our views; by this must we estimate our conduct; and if we are really desirous of ascertaining the truth, there will be little danger of error.

A superficial glance, however, will not suffice. We must not be contented to examine the exterior profession only, nor be concerned to fix the degree of estimation in which our character is held by those with whom we are associated. We may not please ourselves with the correctness of our actions, and be contented to remain in uncertainty with regard to the principles which produce them: neither may we *assume* the rectitude of our motives, because we are induced to be more attentive to the concerns of religion, and are more fastidious in some parts of our conduct, than are some of our neighbours: the very evil we should detect, may still lurk under a plausible

garb of professed piety, and thus readily elude our feeble search.

We are not called to examine ourselves as we appear to others, when we know the eye of the world is fixed upon us; but as we *really are* at home, in the secret retreats of life, in the midst of our family, with our every-day tempers and dispositions, exposed to unnumbered sources of irritation, to trials, to sicknesses, and privations; and, more than all, to the deceitfulness of the heart!

Nor are we simply in danger of looking at a few weeds on the surface, and of forgetting the source from which they spring; but we are likewise disposed to give only a partial inspection. We possess, perhaps from nature, some quality which we vainly imagine is superior: we pride ourselves on its exercise, we conceive that this will hide a multitude of defects, and atone for the errors and the follies of our daily life; and it is to this part of our conduct that we most readily turn the inquiring eye, while we fondly strive to forget all our faults in the complacent satisfaction we derive from the conscious exercise of this one virtue. We must be divested of partiality before we can be prepared to investigate our conduct; and we must distinctly remember

that it is to the *whole*, and not to the exercise of one insulated principle, that our attention must be directed.

It will be generally found, that this is not a pleasant duty, that it brings to our view so much that affords matter for sorrow, as to divest us of all our self-complacency. But if we are sinful and estranged from God, this is the very *effect* intended to be produced; and why should we hesitate to employ the means? The end designed by affliction is the sanctification of its subject. And how can this be accomplished, but by the discovery of error, by repentance and turning to God, and by the exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only Mediator? We cannot mortify sin, unless we know and trace its existence and its power; nor resist temptation, unless we are acquainted with its influence; we cannot grow in conformity with the image of Christ, unless we seek diligently to destroy the reigning power of mortal corruption, nor become acquainted with the heart, unless we commune with ourselves, and examine its inmost recesses. We shall not justly appreciate the littleness of the events of this life, and the magnitude and importance of the concerns of *eternity*, until we know our own hearts, their aversion from all

that is good, their tendency to evil, their attachment to the earth and all its vanities, and their entire unfitness for heaven.

We cannot indulge security, unless we are satisfied of our advancement in the divine life; and how can *we* be satisfied with *our* puny *attainments*, when the great apostle of the Gentiles declares that he acts, not as though he had already attained, either were already perfect, but exclaims, "I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do: forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* Let us then be active and diligent: let us not be slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

It is then our duty to examine ourselves with sincerity, entreating the presence and assistance of the Holy Spirit of Truth. For we are feeble, guilty creatures: we cannot think a good thought, nor do a good action; and it is only through strengthening grace, that we shall

* Phil. iii. 12—14.

be able to perform this duty aright. We must do our part; but God alone can bless our feeble efforts; he only can thoroughly know the heart, and disclose its secrets to us, can lead and guide us into the way of truth, enable us to walk in the light of his countenance, and teach us to profit by his word and by his dispensations. With earnest solicitude, then, shall we adopt the prayer of the Psalmist, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting," * with the delightful confidence, that the prayer of faith will be heard and answered.

* Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE DUTY OF RESIGNATION.

SUBMISSION to the will of God, under the afflictive events with which he is pleased to visit his children, is a lesson of the first importance, and a paramount duty of the Christian mourner. The sacrifice of a contrite, obedient spirit, is well pleasing to God. The exercise of cheerful resignation to his will is, perhaps, a duty the most difficult to perform; but it involves a principle which, when it originates from a heart-felt conviction of the power and wisdom of Jehovah, regulated and characterized by his mercy and love, from a persuasion of his right to do with us as seemeth good in his sight, and of his inflexible justice and matchless purity; when it is strengthened by the recollection of His faithfulness, who has promised that all things shall work together for the eventual good of those

who love, and serve, and fear him; when it is founded on the propriety of our obedience to Him whose we are; and when it is sanctioned by an abiding sense of our own sinfulness and exposure to the wrath of God, with just views of the great good to be accomplished in us, is at once the most delightful and the highest attainment of the Christian temper on earth.

However plausible and easy this may appear to be in theory; however much it may seem to be the natural result of the Christian character, it is quite certain, that to feel the chastening hand of God, and at the same time to exercise a cheerful acquiescence in the divine appointment, is so contrary to human nature, that it is extremely difficult to bear suffering with that meekness, humility, patience, submission, and sorrow for sin, which are included in this grace. Hence the necessity of becoming familiar with the duty, and striving most earnestly, not only to know, but to feel and practise it.

Resignation pre-supposes a *decided preference* of *doing* what God commands, and *undergoing* what he inflicts, to the enjoyment of our *own pleasures and desires.* Before the human mind can cheerfully bear its inclinations to be thwarted, and its affections nipped in their

kindliest growth, it must be deeply imbued with the righteousness of Jehovah's character and government, and with the infinite value of the soul: it must have been taught the vanity of seeking happiness in the creature, and the superior nature of religious joys. Naturally self-willed, attached to the present scenes, and desirous of gratifying those affections and feelings which own a depraved heart for their source, and present objects for their centre, it is not easy to give up our own will thus entirely, and requires not only our renewal by the Holy Spirit, but likewise the exercise of a constant reliance on *Him* who demands these sacrifices only for our good.

Resignation implies a distrust of our own understanding, and a cheerful confidence in the wisdom of God. The mind fondly clings to the imperfect views of mortality, and, with the scanty knowledge of a day, often vainly imagines that it could remedy evils and alleviate sufferings which we now see and feel to be prevalent and inevitable. But the pride of intellect must be abandoned; we must become as little children, before we can suffer the will of God with placid submission. We must cease to speculate on the causes and consequences of our suffering,

and to scrutinize inquisitively the reasons of the divine appointment; we must believe that it is right, because *he* does it; and rely with confidence on his gracious promise, that "what we know not now, we shall know hereafter." God has promised to reveal to us his designs in a future life, and to enable us to perceive the end of that affliction which sovereign mercy has commissioned to detach us from the world.

This duty pre-supposes a belief of the *goodness of God.* We must possess exalted views of a Saviour's character, before we can trust our all in his hands. Could we entertain a doubt of his infinite holiness, believe the possibility of his unkindness, or indulge the thought that all his dispensations are not the result of his compassion, we could not commit ourselves to his care and guidance. But God is *love:* he has revealed himself under the most endearing characters; he has exhibited his mercy, in that he has reconciled us to himself through the blood of a dying Redeemer; and will he not likewise give us inferior blessings? He is infinitely good; he does not willingly afflict his children, but chastens them for their profit; and, assured that all our trials proceed from this pure source, we cheerfully resign ourselves to his disposal.

Our heavenly Father has promised to support us, and informs us, that he has commissioned trials to bring about our sanctification. And if we contemplate the character of God, the equity of his government, the appointments of his providence, and his dealings with ourselves, we shall have reason to believe, that *He is faithful who has promised*, and that he is able to keep that which we have committed to his care.

The duty of resignation comprehends, farther, an unfeigned dedication of ourselves to the Lord of heaven and earth. We must have chosen him for our God, because he has made us his children; and have determined to know nothing among men save Jesus Christ and him crucified. We must have been convinced of our dependence on him, and have resolved with all our hearts and minds to live to his glory, before we can cheerfully seek to *know and to do his will exclusively.* Then shall we not be moved by any of these light afflictions, but shall consider simply the hand of God, acknowledge that not the minutest circumstance escapes his observation, and be earnestly desirous of doing what he requires, under every changing scene.

From this slight sketch, it is evident that the perfect exercise of this principle is no ordi-

nary attainment; but it is not a trifling good we have placed before us as the prize. The active influence of this grace diffuses so much peace and serenity over the mind, affords such solid ground of consolation, and gives so well-founded a hope of our eternal interest in the Saviour's righteousness, that it is indeed worthy our pursuit; for success will prove a source of unspeakable blessing, and we shall praise the hand that has afflicted us.

The possession of this virtue, in its active influence, as it weans from earth, and leads us to place our affections on heavenly objects, is infinitely more necessary to our peace than any comfort we may have lost. An all-wise Jehovah has taken from us a beloved object—the source of much present pleasure; but it is his design to bring us to love him more—to mature us for the enjoyment of richer blessings in a world of unfading bliss—and to make us more like unto Him who was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

We are in the frequent habit of repeating that beautiful and concise petition "Thy will be done;" yet we too often overlook the extensive duties it embraces, and the boundless submission which it promises. It is reasonable that

God should try the patience of his children, and teach them obedience to his will. Hence, there are the best of reasons for their afflictions, without which they would be destitute of these graces, which can only be exemplified when their wills are opposed. The Christian character can be perfected only by the exercise of these principles; and hence we pray daily, that God would try us, and purify us, and, consequently, would oppose our inclinations and desires; in truth, that he would afflict us.

This prayer includes a profession of our readiness to suffer for Christ's sake. When, therefore, death removes "the desire of his eyes with a stroke," the Christian still will bless God—will praise him for that grace which enables him to support his trials—will look to Jesus as to the kind shepherd who will not suffer him to want—will receive all his appointments with a placid and grateful heart, and seek to be more and more closely united to him. We pray that the work of patience may be wrought and pefected in us, and we leave the care of accomplishing this great end, to Him who best knows our hearts, and can well appreciate its necessity.

It is possible, that, in effect, we entreat that some of our favourite schemes may be

thwarted, our loveliest prospects shrouded, and our greatest earthly blessings removed from us; and yet, in the anticipation of all these circumstances, we promise a cheerful acquiescence in the divine will. It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good, is the temper in which the greatest afflictions should be encountered. We may, indeed, pray for their removal, with submission to the appointment of Heaven; but we must conclude our petition in the words of our Saviour: "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done."

The best safeguard of our peace, and the most appropriate expression of our affectionate dependence on the divine power, will be, to exercise contentment with our lot however adverse, and to suppress the secret murmurings of that heart which is by nature prone to rebellion against God. It will not be sufficient that we avoid accusing of injustice the Supreme Being, or uttering our displeasure by insinuations against the goodness and purity of his character: that we avoid accusing him of unkindness or partiality in the distribution of his favours; or that we profess our submission to his appointments, our obedience to his will, and our attachment to his government and his cause: but

the secret discontent of the heart must be sought out and combated, a feeling which, though frequently unexpressed, occupies and estranges the mind, and fills it with unjust and injurious thoughts of our heavenly Father.

Do we, then, now entertain exalted ideas of Jehovah's character, and of the equity of his dealings with us? Can we deliberately pronounce his work to be good? And are our affections warmed and kindled by the discipline with which he has visited us, rather than contracted and shrivelled by the indulgence of discontent? If there be no expansion of the heart; if we cannot bless God for his mercy in afflicting us, we have not yet learned the duty of acquiescence in his will.

The Christian's temper, and particularly his decided preference of the love of God to every inferior blessing, is peculiarly exercised under seasons of affliction. Submission to the will of God cannot readily be counterfeited: there is nothing in the human mind sufficiently analogous with it, to assume its prevailing features. It cannot be mistaken for the principles of the Stoic. These, indeed, may do much in fortifying the mind; but they can never bring it to a patient submission to the disposal of Infinite Wis-

dom. The highest lessons of philosophic morality fall very far short of this last but best attainment of the Christian. And, indeed, this important point of duty can only be learnt of God: it can only be kept alive in the heart by his power; it can only be invigorated and supported in the soul that lives with God. The heart which dwells much upon the earth; the thoughts that are engaged on worldly objects; the affections which are anxiously fixed on the things that are seen, and which do not principally delight to love God, and to hold communion with him, are obstacles to the exercise of resignation.

It is, indeed, quite possible to bear suffering without complaining, and yet not to be resigned to the will of Heaven; it is possible to practise the careless apathy of indifference, without the smallest claim to that calm composure of heart which knows and feels, admires and loves, the chastisements which proceed from God. There are characters whose pride will bear them far above the influence of complaint, but whose breast is agitated by tumultuous passions, and occupied with harsh and rebellious thoughts against God, and his goodness and mercy. There are, unquestionably, those, who, in the apparent calmness with which they meet trials, would seem to hold out

examples of suffering affliction, but who endure from necessity what they consider as unavoidable, because murmuring would but add to their disquietude, and who stubbornly refuse to yield obedience to the all-wise hand which dispenses every affliction as well as every pleasure. Their quietude arises from want of feeling on the one hand, or from indifference to the judgments of God, not from that peace which passeth all understanding.

The equanimity of the Christian may, perhaps, arise in part from similar principles, and while he aims to be submissive to his heavenly Father, he will inquire if his resignation proceed from just principles, and if its tendency be to wean the heart from the world, and to make him more in love with the beauties of religion, and the glorious prospects of an unseen state. In the performance of this difficult but important duty, he will be desirous of obtaining every assistance, to strengthen his faith and hope, and dependence upon God. Such assistance has been supplied in the animating example of suffering saints, with which the Holy Scriptures abound.

Abraham was called upon to sacrifice his son Isaac—his *only son*—the child of his old age—and him on whom so large a promise depended.

He was called to yield him up into the hands of God who gave him, when his opening faculties had endeared him to an aged father's heart, by many interesting associations and brightening prospects of his future greatness, and usefulness, and blessedness. For this sad event he is quite unprepared; and it is aggravated, too, by being apparently within his own controul. His darling child is not taken away by disease, or by any of those accidents to which human nature is liable. Had this been the case, Abraham might have reflected on the impossibility of his returning to him, and of the mercy of God in having removed him. But he is directed to prepare for his death —to be himself the instrument!—to immolate his son to the Almighty! Can any circumstances more distressing be conceived, which would more probably excite all the agonizing reluctance of parental affection? And yet, when the Lord Jehovah calls him, he answers, "Here am I;" in faith he resigns himself to the disposal of God; and with the most perfect submission to his will, he proceeds even to the last extremity. God, however, interposes; and he will interpose for you; not, indeed, in the same miraculous manner, but in enabling you to bear with meekness and patience the trial with which he has visited you.

We see how honourable a testimony is borne to Abraham's faith by the Apostle Paul, and the great and inestimable benefits with which it is connected. And the Lord himself declares that he is well pleased with this humble sacrifice; for, "By myself I have sworn, saith the Lord, because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed my voice."*

Here is encouragement to wait upon God, and do his will: an incentive to acquiescence in all his appointments, however painful and adverse. Here too is a distinguishing proof of the influence of religion in supporting the mind under the most afflictive dispensations; and when we recollect, that this was exhibited by one who did not, as we do, enjoy a clear revelation of Jesus Christ, it is enough to excite the crimson glow of shame, that, with all our privileges, we are so far behind the patriarch of old. Let us emulate his example, and earnestly pray for his faith,

* Genesis xxii. 16—18.

his submission, his obedience, and then may we expect to inherit the blessings which are prepared for those who follow his steps.

Many other eminent saints have left examples of resignation and patience under affliction, such as Job, and David, and others; all serving to strengthen and confirm the inferences we have drawn from the example of Abraham. Neither are the instances of a patient endurance of affliction confined to the Old Testament dispensation: for the Apostles counted it *joy* to suffer for Christ's sake; and the primitive Christians, actuated by lively faith in the Redeemer, endured the cross, despised the most cruel persecutions, cheerfully underwent a great variety of privations, and suffered distresses, fully equal to any which can fall to the lot of humanity, in the present day. Yet their strength was made perfect in weakness; they were enabled not only to be submissive, and to endure with fortitude, but to rejoice in tribulation, to triumph over death in every frightful shape; and to commit the keeping of their souls unto a faithful Creator. God was with them and supported them: his presence was the ground of their joy, and their acquiescence in his will, the means of their receiving the richest blessings. He is able to keep us

from falling, to preserve us from every danger, and to refine and purify us from all iniquity.

God has likewise given for our imitation, the example of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ. Our adorable Lord was no stranger to sorrow, for he was despised and rejected of men, yet he opened not his mouth: he took upon himself our infirmities, and supported the accumulated weight of human woe; yet without the smallest admixture of sin: in this world he was poor, despised, and persecuted, arraigned as a criminal, and condemned, though innocent, to suffer the death of the cross: surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our infirmities; he bore our sins in his own body on the cross; he suffered the wrath of God, due to the sins of guilty rebels; and, above all, he was deprived of the supporting, comforting presence of *his Father*, so that he exclaims, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Was ever grief like this? "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." Yet, though he prays earnestly and repeatedly, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" he adds, "nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."* Thus, in his incarnation, his life, his sufferings and his death, he every where exhibits,

* Matt. xxvi. 39, 27, 46.

for the imitation of his followers, an example of perfect submission.

Can there be a more powerful stimulus to resignation than this, to resemble in some faint degree the perfection of a dying Redeemer, unto whose likeness we must be conformed in life, and into whose image we shall be changed from glory to glory in a world of bliss? We shall be happy in proportion as we resemble our crucified Lord; and can expect the consolation of his grace, only in following him. Under trials, it is delightful to the Christian to reflect, that it is by the instrumentality of these unwelcome monitors he is led to follow Christ. During the calm sunshine of prosperity he may perchance maintain his ground, more probably will grow lukewarm; but it is only through much tribulation he can follow his incarnate Lord. *His* path to heaven led through difficulties, and sorrows, and temptations, and so will that of all his children who take up their cross and follow him. Let us then welcome the affliction which promises, if sanctified, to advance us nearer to his throne, and to assimilate us with himself. May we be ashamed, that we live at so great a distance from God; that, in the calmest moments of resignation, we fall so far short

of *His* obedience to the will of his heavenly Father, and that our hearts are so cold and lifeless, in being taught "to profit." May we seek the guidance of his Spirit to lead us into the way of all truth, and to bring us to himself!

He who well knew the human heart, and that it needed "line upon line, and precept upon precept," has not only given us examples of obedience, but his word is amply stored with precepts and promises to enforce the duty. A few scattered observations from the Sacred Writings are placed below. "Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble: I will deliver him and honour him: with long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation. The Lord is nigh unto all that call upon him, unto all that call upon him in truth. The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth them, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not, for I will help thee. When the poor and needy seek water and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will lead him also, and restore comfort to him, and to his mourners. But now, O Lord, thou art our father: we are the clay, and thou our potter, and we all are the work of thine hand. For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you; and ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart, and I will be found of you, saith the Lord. Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion, according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not willingly afflict nor grieve the children of men. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let

your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons, for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But, if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons. Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble; incline thine ear unto me: in the day when I call, answer me speedily. In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul. Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe, and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually. O Lord, be not far from me. O my God, make haste for my help. Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation. Forsake me not, O Lord. O my God, be not far from me. Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me. O Lord, make haste to help me. Will he plead against me with his great power? No! but he will put strength in me. The Lord is on my side, I will not fear what man can do unto me. The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, though I

walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee. He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye. We have a strong city: salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone."*

Afflictions are indeed blessings in disguise. David says, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I have known thy ways." And he concludes "that it was good for him to have been afflicted."† He esteemed it one of his greatest mercies: and thus it ever is with

* Job xiv. 15. Psalm xc. 15, 16; cxlviii. 18; xxxiv. 17; xxxvi. 7. Isaiah xli. 10, 13, 17; lvii. 18; lxiv. 8. Jeremiah xxix. 11—14. Lamentations ii. 32, 33. Psalm li. 17. Philippians iv. 6, 7. Hebrews xii. 7. Psalm cii. 2; cxxxviii. 3; cxix. 117; lxxi. 12; xxxviii. 21, 22; xl. 13; cxviii. 6; xxvii. 1, 3; xxiii. 4; Job xxiii. 6. Psalm lv. 22. 1 Peter v. 7. Psalm xci. 1. Zechariah ii. 8. Isaiah xxvi. 1. Psalm xci. 12.

† Psalm cxix. 67, 71.

the children of God in this world; they will find a blessing concealed behind the darkest cloud, provided they wait and pray for it. The consideration of this circumstance should lead us to the exercise of cheerfulness. We should aim not only to be submissive, but grateful, not merely to bear with contentment the hand which smites, but likewise to praise him from whom all blessings flow.

It is not contended that the mourner should not feel and lament, but only that his brow should not be ever clouded by anxiety, his spirits depressed beyond recovery, nor his temper rendered wayward by discontent. He should aim at that cheerfulness which arises from casting all his burden upon God, and the consciousness of having intrusted himself and his all in his hands. "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, ye may be also."*

When the fond husband, or the tender

* John xiv. 1—3.

parent, weeps over the dear relative whom death has snatched away, as the fragrant blossom was hasting to maturity, the earth appears a mere blank, an empty space, a lifeless portrait, a landscape in which we must appear to move, but whence the vital principle, which till now has animated our bosoms, has fled for ever. He must finish his journey alone, and the *solitude* of his aching bosom will be relieved only by those unparticipated disquietudes which await him as he passes through life.

But when he looks beyond the grave, to the rest which remaineth for the people of God; when he contemplates the dearest friend of his bosom removed from suffering, and entered into this rest; translated from earth to heaven, from sorrow to joy, from pain to immortality, and transformed into the image of his Redeemer; he experiences a degree of peace which nought else can afford. He calmly yields to the will of his heavenly Father, and finds a satisfaction almost indescribable, while his spirit bounds forward in anticipation of the blissful period, when mortality shall be swallowed up of life; when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and his spirit, disengaged from the dull prison of mortality, shall wing its flight to realms of day.

Imagination fondly pictures the guardian care of those we have lost, as especially extended over *us;* and as it verges to the last closing scene, and looks forward to the translation of the soul to a heavenly world, it faintly portrays the exquisite delight it would experience, on being welcomed to this peaceful habitation, by that glorified spirit, now the hapless occasion of his grief and of his tears; but ever after the endeared companion and participator of his eternal felicity. You may weep for your loss: even the Saviour wept for Lazarus: but all his disciples, all who hope to be with him hereafter, must "weep as though they wept not," must be prepared to resign every blessing they enjoy, when called upon to take up their cross and follow him. For "whosoever loveth father or mother, or husband or wife, more than me, hath no part in my kingdom:" while we are assured on the other hand, that "these light afflictions which are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: and that in due time we shall reap, if we faint not."

With these glorious prospects, who would not pray for submission to the will of God? It

is an arduous but imperative duty, and trusting to our own strength, we must fail in the performance. Hence the necessity of seeking for divine assistance from Him who has declared, "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you. In the world, ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."* So long as we attempt to exercise submission to the will of God *of ourselves*, so often shall we find that the human heart is enmity against him, and that it is not naturally subject to his will. While we remain frail, imperfect, erring creatures, we shall stand in need of extraordinary consolation and support, or we shall be incapable of glorifying God, by our acquiescence in his will, and our humble, cheerful reliance on his goodness, and mercy, and love. Thus our almighty and compassionate Father has provided for our necessities: he knows our hearts and frailties better than we do ourselves: and he has kindly promised the assistance of *his Spirit*, who is emphatically styled the Comforter, even the Spirit of truth, who "shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance." "Without me ye can do nothing," says the Saviour; "and

* John xvi. 33.

in his strength you will be more than conquerors."

Those only who are taught by the Spirit of grace, can feel that entire *acquiescence in the word of God*, from which so much comfort is to be derived. Though the Scriptures may conciliate our regards by their intrinsic beauty, and majesty, and grandeur; yet they will never engage our hearts and affections, but through the agency of the Spirit. And unless this be the case, the efficiency of the divine word as a source of consolation, will rest on a very precarious basis. How shall we obey the commandments of the Lord, unless we seriously and believingly receive them? And how shall we receive them, if we are not taught of God? It is only by the Spirit's influence that we become united to Christ, and heirs of the blessings which are treasured up in him: it is only as "the Spirit of holiness" dwells in us, that we can be estranged from the world, become dead to sin, and alive to righteousness, and can do that which is well pleasing in his sight: or that we can live by faith, and walk in newness of life. It is his office to take of the things of Christ, and reveal them unto us: and by his agency alone, we can be strengthened, and enabled to

yield to the merciful corrections of our almighty Friend.

Nor was this Comforter promised only to the Apostles, but to all the children of God. Were it not for his effectual presence and blessing, they could not sustain the trials with which they are, and have been, visited. But he is ever present with those that love him, he will be found of those who seek him. Through his wisdom we shall learn obedience; through his strength we shall be encouraged to walk on in our duty; and by his influence we shall be purified from sin, and receive the riches of grace which are treasured up in Christ Jesus; we shall be enabled under every affliction to maintain adequate and right thoughts of God; our spiritual strength will be preserved; we shall walk correctly, since he helpeth our infirmity; and as he maketh continual intercession for us, we shall come boldly to a throne of grace, and seek grace and strength for every time of need.

Happy are we, if we have in some degree realized his comforting, supporting presence; if we, through his influence, have embraced a Saviour, and are desirous of being taught of God; if, forsaking every present vain and feeble prop, we

come to Jesus with child-like dispositions, simply desirous of submitting our whole souls to his disposal. Then have we reason to rejoice in the darkest hour: even during the storm we shall not feel its terrors, we shall be safe, for Jesus is our hiding-place. Guide us, O blessed Spirit, to this safe abode, and preserve us from wandering from thy way.

Yet so feeble is the mind, so prone the heart to deviate from its centre, that we stand in need of every possible support in the performance of this most important duty. Hence, it is well frequently to review those considerations which form the basis of acquiescence in the divine appointment. And when the turbulence of passion is almost enough to overwhelm the Christian, and induce him to distrust the faithfulness of God, let the circumstances of his affliction be reviewed, let him regard them with the eye of religion, weigh them in the balance of Scripture, and ask himself, whether God has forgotten to be gracious, rather, whether he has not remembered mercy, at the very moment his arm was extended to afflict?

Are there not very many circumstances of palliation in the present affliction, to excite your gratitude and confidence? Have you not many

mercies to be thankful for, and might not these likewise have been smitten? Might not God have required your all, instead of this loveliest blessing? And is it not infinitely kind of him to provide you such everlasting and substantial consolation? to promise to be with you, and improve you by means of suffering? Besides, has not your dear relative been taken from the evil to come, and translated from a thorny wilderness to the joys of Paradise? A gracious Saviour had nurtured and prepared him for everlasting glory: and should you wish for his return to earth and sorrow? This would be a sad exchange indeed, while death has paved the way to everlasting happiness and peace.

Perhaps you had watched all the expanding beauties of his character, had seen them advance to the maturity of the Christian, and had promised yourself much enjoyment of its excellencies for many years. God chooses wiser and better for you; he has ripened the blooming ear, and gathered the fruit into his garner. He has saved it from the chilly air of sin, from the blasting mildew of indifference, and from the destructive influence of error. Jehovah has perfected the character, and your friend has entered into the joy of his Lord. He calls upon you to follow

him, to prepare for a heavenly world, to be weaned from earth and attached to heaven, to seek that haven of rest where he has now securely anchored.

The Lord God is the *sovereign Disposer* of all. He is the supreme Governor of the universe, his eye is upon the evil and the good, he is every where present, and directs every event by the word of his power. In the government of the world, he displays the most *inflexible justice.* "Justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne. Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him, that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good, and our land shall yield her increase. Righteousness shall go before him, and shall set us in the way of his steps."* He is not man that he should err, nor the son of man that he should repent; but a *Being* of infinite purity and holiness, presiding over the actions and thoughts of men, and overruling them to his glory.

* Ps. lxxxix. 14; lxxxv. 9—13.

No caprice, no unjust and unworthy motives, no angry passions influence his conduct: his decrees are the offspring of holiness, justice, and truth: what he has appointed should come to pass, none can hinder: for, even the winds and the waves obey him, and all things animate and inanimate are controlled by his will, and become subservient to the execution of his purposes. He is *infinite wisdom*. Nothing can occur without his knowledge. Where least the hand of Omnipotence can be traced, still there he silently governs and directs the most trivial event. Nothing can escape his piercing eye: he sees the past, the present, and the future; and what he arranges for the good of his children, is the offspring of boundless intelligence. No contingencies happen to him; no *unforeseen* circumstances influence his will, for he is acquainted with all possibilities, and knows at once the remotest consequences.

As our adorable Lord is infinitely wise, so is he merciful and good. He beareth long with sinners; he suffereth our wanderings from him; he showers down his blessings upon ungrateful man; he surrounds him with mercies, and would allure him to the enjoyment of everlasting peace and happiness in his service and love. Surely

then it becomes us to be obedient to the acts of His government, whose punishments are ever lighter than our sins; who is able to preserve us from falling, and to supply every want; who is acquainted with the most secret recesses of our bosom; whose heart is filled with pity and compassion, and overflows with loving-kindness to his children; who does not willingly afflict them, and only for their good; who is able to support, and willing to afford them everlasting consolation.

Nor must we forget, that, as a Sovereign, he has a distinct claim to our obedience, and a perfect right to do with us as seemeth good in his sight. He is our Creator and Preserver; in him we live, by him we breathe, and our comforts are sustained. We are his children, his subjects; and, as such, obedience to his laws is required of us. For can we temporize with Him, who sees our inmost thoughts, and is intimately acquainted with all we feel. His yoke is "easy," and his burden "light;" for he supports the cumbrous load: and though he will have his children willing to sustain the trials of his discipline, yet he has promised strength equal to their day; he has engaged to be with them; yea, he sympathizes with them, and kindly shares the weight of sorrows under which they groan.

This idea is still further enhanced by the consideration of our dependence upon him. Our daily blessings are received from his hand; our especial mercies are the offspring of his love and of his care. The good we commonly enjoy, and almost overlook the hand which dispenses, comes equally from Him to whom we owe our greatest benefits. Perhaps we undervalue our blessings of light, and air, and health, because we enjoy them every day; when in fact, for the continuance of these, we are equally dependent upon God. Where it not for his goodness and ever-watchful care, were it not for his constant preservation, we should no longer be cheered with the vicissitudes of the seasons, the sun might withhold its light, and the air we breathe would soon become contaminated, had he not wisely provided for its renovation. Ungrateful man is alone insensible to his Creator's kindness, when all nature wakes out of sleep, and, as the day dawns from on high, hails the rising sun with cheerful aspirations of praise to Him who governs and preserves the universe in its present harmonious perfection.

Should we then undervalue our comforts, because they are daily received? Especial blessings are alone required on particular emergen-

cies; it is every day, we need a renewed supply of daily mercies. It is the goodness of God, which leads him to declare it to be his delight to dwell with the children of men. It is solely his mercy and love which induce him to take pity on us, and to offer us his friendship, and presence, and blessing. It is his infinite goodness, which leads us to bear with our wanderings, and affectionately to invite us to repentance. It is his goodness which supplies our wants, corrects our errors, and defends us in danger. "Of ourselves, we are insufficient as of ourselves to think any good thing: but our sufficiency is of God: for of him, and to him, and through him, are all things."*

If we have any hope of eternal happiness; if we have any benevolent dispositions towards those around us, if, when we have backsliden from God, our hearts are filled with sorrow and contrition, and we wish to return unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls; if we obtain pardon of our iniquities and reconciliation to Him whose favour is life; and if we are enabled to persevere in a virtuous course; still all this is of God, who worketh in us both to will and to do: all is of God, who hath first reconciled us

* 2 Cor. iii. 5.

to himself, through Jesus Christ, his Son and our Saviour, who is the medium through which we receive the communication of his favours. And still further, it is only by the quickening influence of the Holy Spirit, which proceedeth from the Father and the Son, that we can be made capable of receiving the great blessings he has to bestow. So entirely dependent are we on Almighty God, for all we have, and are, or hope to be hereafter.

Is it not most reasonable, that we should cheerfully submit to Him who is thus our sovereign guide here, and will be our everlasting judge: that we should yield obedience to Him by whom we think and feel, and in whom alone we live and breathe: that we should delight to do or to suffer the will of Him who bestows upon his people such peculiar blessings, and who makes affliction the means of their sanctification? Is it not most wise to yield submissively to Him, who, while he deprives us of one blessing, is able, is willing, is waiting to bestow on us blessings far superior, even "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit," and to fix all our hopes and affections on himself? He removes temporal, in order to confer spiritual blessings; he takes away your friend, in order to bestow upon you

himself, and teach you to value his presence, his truth, his love.

But God is likewise a *faithful Creator*. In contemplating the character of Jehovah as the Creator, this title must not be confined to the mere act by which the heavens and the earth were formed, but must extend likewise to the preservation of all things. He superintends the work of his hands: by his watchful providence he sees the wants of his creatures, and he affords them suitable supplies, always providing *what is best for them*. "These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled; thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth."*

It is a source of pleasing reflection to the Christian sufferer, that nothing happens to him by chance. Even the sparrows are the objects of the Almighty's care; and how much more, man, in so far as he is better than many sparrows! Even the hairs of his head are numbered, and

* Ps. civ. 27—29, 33.

nothing can occur to him, but as the instrument of divine compassion and tender regard. Not the meanest insect escapes his providential notice; and in a particular manner he watches over his people, and preserves them from harm, or directs their path where he has chosen they should walk.

All creatures are subject to his will, and none can injure us, but in the accomplishment of his designs: and, if we are sincerely desirous of loving and serving him, we know that love is the mainspring of his conduct towards us. He watches over his children with assiduity, and he will not that any should harm them, but seeks to recall them to his fold. Could we keep in view the design of infinite benignity in afflicting us, and rest assured of the wisdom of his appointments; could we regard the tendency of affliction to humble us, to convince us of slothfulness, to rouse us to the exercise of patience, to subdue the irregularities of our affections and passions, and excite us to practise Christian self-denial; we should then leave ourselves in his hand. Though the eye be dimmed by the tear of agony, and incapable of tracing his footsteps in the storms which desolate our fairest prospects and dearest hopes; though we cannot penetrate the cloud

which surrounds us; and though our little sun of earthly joy seems to have sunk below the horizon, never to return and animate us with his cheering presence; yet we must ever remember, that God rides upon the whirlwind and manages the storm, conducts every event by the pure light of his wisdom and truth, arranges each in the most exact order, and directs it to its proper end. Soon, the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings; and though you have lost your dearest friend, yet his happy spirit, freed from the shackles of mortality, has winged its flight to realms of day, and is now shining, and will for ever shine, in the mansions of the blest. "Lo! these are parts of his ways, but how little a portion is heard of him!"

The Almighty governs his people in love, and for their good: hence, they owe him their grateful aspirations of praise for his gracious support, a calm and deliberate dedication of themselves to him, during the darkest hours of adversity, and a firm reliance on his goodness and love with respect to the future. In the gloomiest seasons, the Christian will still lift up his heart to heaven, and pray for that patience and submission, which are the gift of God. "Yea, though he walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he

will fear no evil;" for he will exclaim, "Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

But God is also a compassionate Father. In this endearing relationship he is ever nigh unto his people, and that to bless them. We are his children by creation, and we partake the common blessings of his bounty; but we are his children more especially by virtue of his grace implanted in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. When we have received Christ as our Saviour, and our only hope; when we have renounced our attachment to the "pomps and vanities" of this world; when we have learned to yield obedience to him, and to strive earnestly to live to his glory; then we are, indeed, his children, and God is our Father. As such, he provides for our every want; he watches over us with unremitting care; he restrains our wanderings from him; and when he sees it necessary to correct us, he looks down upon us with the tenderest sympathy.

How fondly does the affectionate parent watch over the infant years of her helpless offspring! How eagerly does she listen to its feeblest cry, and cheerfully abandon her own comforts for the sake of her child! How large a space in her heart is occupied by her darling babe! All

her life is characterized by the pursuit of its happiness. How tenderly does she watch over its expanding mind! How carefully does she preserve it from the contagion of vice, while she nurtures the benevolent affections, and, with the earliest dawn of reason's morn, instils the pure principles of Christianity! With what fearful forebodings does she anticipate the period when this sweet flower must be exposed to the stormy world! With what care does she prepare it for the trials, the difficulties, and dangers of life! With what diligence does she repress the first angry emotions, the first symptoms of vice! Not contented with providing for her offspring food, and raiment, and temporal comforts, and knowledge, the Christian parent strives to rear it in the nursery of Piety, for the Paradise of God; and while she would acquaint it early with its fallen state, and the only hope of recovery, she would earnestly train and discipline the mind to *propriety of conduct originating from correctness of principle.* Though her heart be filled with affection and tenderness, yet with wisdom and justice she corrects the wandering, and punishes the disobedient and self-willed.

But our Father which is in heaven is infinitely wise; he is love: his compassions fail not,

and he cannot be influenced by the infirmities or necessities of our nature. "Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust. His truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon-day. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked; because thou hast made the Lord which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling; for he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless

them,"* He declares that an earthly parent may forget her offspring, yet cannot *he* cease to have compassion on his children. His bowels yearn over their sorrows: in all their affliction, he is afflicted; and the angel of his presence is nigh to comfort them.

What inference, then, must we draw from this display of the tenderness of Jehovah's character? Must we not allow, that as our Father, when he requires that the heart and affections should be placed on himself, he has an absolute right to them? He knows *what is best for us:* hence the necessity of yielding obedience to him, and the sinfulness of withholding any thing from him.

He is an all-sufficient friend. Who has not felt the value of friendship in the hour of sorrow? Who has not proved the truth of the sentiment, that "it is the winter of sorrow best proves" the worth of a friend? The kind hand of affection; the sympathetic tear; the warm heart which beats in unison with another's woe; the bosom expanded to receive the expression of heartfelt anguish, and animated with kindred emotion; the mild and persuasive eloquence which would alleviate when it cannot

* Ps. xci. 3—11. Numb. vi. 24—27.

remedy, and which would sooth and calm when it cannot alleviate; and the anxious desire to participate every painful feeling, and to share each rising thought; possess claims which none can estimate but those who have experienced their power.

But friendship is bounded by the narrow sphere of sympathy: it aims to relieve, where it can only *share* the anguish of the troubled bosom: it would set the heart at rest, but it can only palliate its oppression: it would give peace, and restore the lost blessing, when it can only bear a part of the weight of suffering. But Jehovah is *able* as well as *willing*. His boundless sympathy far exceeds the highest conceptions of human love; and when he would share our griefs and carry our burdens, he can give peace to the mind—peace which passeth all understanding. He can participate our sorrows; and though he inflicts the wound, he will faithfully provide the balm: when *he* giveth quietness, who then shall create sorrow?

His faithfulness is engaged to support, comfort, and assist us; and finally give us a happy issue out of every trial. He is a very present help in trouble. We cannot always enjoy the soothing accents of the voice of friendship; but

our almighty Friend is always with us: during the sleepless night and restless day, his presence is our stay. When deprived of earthly comforts, and the mind rests with gloomy delight on the exquisitely painful and dreary solitude with which it is encompassed, then God is nigh; *he* kindly proffers his support: he can make the wilderness to blossom as the rose, and the heart of the widow to sing for joy.

A thousand circumstances may interrupt the communion of friendship upon earth: but God is not like to corruptible man; he is omnipotent and unchangeable. He knows not the shadow of turning: he is a friend that loveth at all times. Do we need to pour out the anguish of our souls into the bosom of friendship, he invites us to himself, and promises rest to the weary and the heavy laden. Do we require sympathy, he feels for us: he knows what sore temptations mean; he is acquainted with the feebleness of our nature, and affords support; he is ever present, hears our complaints, and has engaged to send us answers of peace. Do we need consolation, he is able and willing to save; he can bind up the broken-hearted, can heal the troubled bosom, and restore peace to the anxious breast. Do we require instruction and direction along

the stormy way, he has promised to guide and protect us; and offers his word as a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. He has said, "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." *

He is a gracious monitor. To give advice, and administer reproof, is one of the most difficult and last performed offices of human friendship. But with God, this is no difficult task. He afflicts in order that the mind may be softened to receive reproof and instruction; he prepares the heart to listen to his admonitions, and thus gaining entire access to the soul, he is enabled by the still small voice of the Spirit of his grace, to say, "This is the way, walk ye in it." He suggests the existence of the very evil his discipline is intended to remove, or points to the necessity of exercising the graces he has designed to strengthen. He awakens the supineness and indolence of the lethargic bosom, and rouses to activity and exertion in the cause

* John xiv. 27.

of God; and thus prepares the heart for a purer, a more fervent, and a steadier aim, to the promotion of his glory, and the advancement and extension of his power. He enlightens the understanding, renews the will, and enables us to discern, as well as choose, the things which pertain to our everlasting peace. He warns us of danger, cautions against the indulgence of evil, and admonishes of the benefits to be derived from suffering.

Surely, then, we can but infer the peace and safety of yielding submission to a Friend so wise, who condescends to arrange our affairs for us. Omniscient goodness knoweth all things. He wisely ordains what is best for us; and well knowing that we are incapable of choosing for ourselves, he condescends to superintend and appoint the events which shall befall us. Intimately acquainted with these circumstances, surely it is more than folly, if we do not meekly, quietly, and obediently acquiesce in his appointments. Since we remain in his hands, we are safe from every hurtful snare; and we are assured that all things shall work together for our good; for he has promised us protection, and has engaged to convert the bitter cup of sorrow into the healing balm of contrition. He will

give rest unto his people. How urgent a motive to be still in the hour of darkness, and to wait for the peace and the deliverance which he has promised in his own time; assured of our inviolable security, if we put our trust in Him who is our refuge and strength: a "strength to the needy in his distress; a refuge from the storm; a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible one is as a storm against the wall." He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will "wipe away tears from off all faces." And "it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord, we have waited for him; we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation." *

* Isa. xxv. 4, 9.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE SOURCES OF CONSOLATION.

We have already traced the duties of the mourner, and shall now take a view of the consolations provided for him, in submitting to the will of God. These consolations are promised to those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth, who are desirous of imitating his example, and living to his glory.

"There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked;" neither can the troubled bosom, agitated by a thousand turbulent passions and solicitudes, lay claim to a participation of those consolations which are provided only for such as live by faith upon the Son of God. Yet even those who are estranged from God, though they cannot appropriate these comforts to themselves, are not left without solace under the loss of their relatives. They claim our pity, for they

suffer acutely: they feel as much as others, and they have not the same support under their trials. They know the bitterness of sorrow, without the pleasure of obedience; they suffer affliction, without the heart-cheering prospect of eternal rest, when "death shall be swallowed up in victory."

If these pages should fall into the hands of such an one: if you are indeed mourning the loss of your earthly comforts, and not a ray of hope, reflected from eternity, cheers your solitude, and animates you with delightful anticipations of futurity; if you have lost your dearest treasure, that in which your soul delighted, and your prospects are now clouded by the gloom of death; if you are suffering under the mighty hand of God, and yet perceive not the hand that gives you the bread and water of affliction, nor whence cometh your help; if you are experiencing his wrath, and are not induced to inquire wherefore he contends with you, and to search and try your hearts, repent of your iniquities, and turn unto the Lord your God; if you are angry with him under your trials, refusing to yield submission to his will, and calling in question the equity of his government, or the purity, wisdom, and goodness of his dispensations; if

you harden that heart which he would mould into conformity to his will, and impiously murmur against Heaven, or carelessly neglect its admonitions, it is to you I would address the following considerations; and while they tend to mitigate your grief, may they induce you to be seriously concerned about your own state: for, if you have no glimmering of peace, except a vague and ill-defined idea of a future state of ease, it is time that you begin to seek that rest which "remaineth for the people of God."

How are you prepared to enter on an eternal scene of existence, if you cannot bear the will of God? How shall you enjoy the happiness of heaven, where it will be your sole employ to love and serve him, or be conformed to the image of the Saviour, when you refuse obedience to your heavenly Father, and when your heart is fixed and rivetted to earth? It is in this world that the state of man is irrecoverably fixed; he will receive hereafter according to the deeds done in the body; and while you are living estranged from God, and secretly hating his laws and his government, how shall you follow your dear relation, now gone to glory? Thus unprepared for death, and for your coming change, adore the long-suffering goodness and sparing mercy of

Jehovah, that you are not called away from this world, that life is still afforded you, that you are still invited to seek God, and to attend to those things which belong to your everlasting peace.

Disease might have been commissioned to cut short your slender thread of life, instead of your dearest friends: at this moment you might have been *a nothing*; and the future destiny of your soul, born for immortality, might have been fixed. Where, then, would the disembodied spirit have found rest? In heaven? Alas! no: for here there is nothing congenial with it. The atmosphere of heaven is love; the Lamb of God is the light thereof; and all its joy sand all its engagements centre in loving, adoring, and praising Him that was slain for sinners. In these acclamations you could not have united with the spirits of the just; and here, therefore, is no happiness for you. Yet this is the rest prepared for the people of God; and if you cannot enter into it, you must be for ever excluded from the blessedness of the righteous. Your spirit is not fitted for communion with the pure intelligences of a heavenly world: and since there is no alternative but happiness and misery, if you lose the one, you will necessarily enter into the sorrows of those who are excluded from it.

As you have been living without God in the world, and refusing to listen to his admonitions, so have you increased his displeasure; and justly might he call you away from life, and consign you to that cheerless abode, where *Hope never enters*. But though God reminds you of the uncertainty of life; though he shows you the necessity of an habitual preparation for death, and seeks to soften and gain admission to your heart; though he warns you to fly from the wrath to come; invites you to follow him who has entered into the joy of his Lord; offers the blessings of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, and you refuse to listen, yet he spares your life, and again entreats you to come to him, that you might have life. Rejoice, then, that your days are prolonged; and seek to follow those who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises. If you will but listen to the still small voice of the Spirit of God, the affliction under which you now suffer may prove the means of your everlasting blessedness: it may lead you to God for pardon, for grace and strength, and every good and perfect gift.

You have been living in forgetfulness of God, and ignorant of the beneficent hand which has daily been doing you good. You have refused

attention to the invitations of the Gospel, and obedience to the commands of a Saviour, depending upon your own righteousness, and refusing the righteousness of Christ. Affliction, by bringing you to reflection, awakening your fears, and exciting your attention to eternity, may become the instrument of showing you your distance from heaven, and the entire helplessness of your situation: it may bring you to inquire into the way of salvation; to know the nature of the blessings prepared for those who love God; and thus you may be led to lay hold of the hope set before you in the Gospel. If this should prove to be the case, you will greatly rejoice that you have been afflicted, though now for a season you may be in heaviness.

You are environed by all the gloomy solemnities of death. The voice which so lately cheered you, is now hushed in eternal silence; the expressive countenance, though the last smile of affection may still linger on the features, and almost seem to animate the cold and pallid cheek with its wonted hue of pleasure, is now no longer the index of the thousand delightful emotions which once constituted the friend; the beaming eye, so lately sparkling with the matchless eloquence of mild intelligence, is now sunk

into its orbit; the late active bosom, no longer responsive to its kindred heart, lies motionless, incapable of sympathy, alike insensible to present joy or suffering. And can you look on that beloved corpse; can you reflect on the endeared scenes of affection, which memory too faithfully depicts; can you follow the departed spirit to the regions of the blest, and not be incited to inquire, what is death, and how was this painful separation introduced into the world?

To this inquiry, an answer must be given in the words of inspiration: "That by the disobedience of one man, Adam, sin came into the world, and death by sin."* What, then, is this great evil, which has entailed a *curse* upon the children of men, and from which you yourself are not exempt? for, by the same infallible Guide you are informed, that "to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, is the first and great commandment."† Yet your conscience informs you, you do not *so love God;* and if you do not, you have broken his law, and thus obtain an affecting proof of the overwhelming influence of sin over the heart. What, then, is the *cause* of this aversion from God, and from

* Rom. v. 12. † Matt. xxii. 37, 38.

his commandments? It is the reigning influence of a corrupt, depraved nature, inherited from the first transgressor Adam. The Scriptures of everlasting truth inform us, that the heart of man is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" that we cannot think a good thought, nor do a good action; that if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, we make God a liar, and the truth is not in us; that we are prone to evil, and that continually; and that there is none righteous, there is none that understandeth, none that seeketh after God.

Man was created in the image of God, and formed in purity and innocence; but he broke the law of God, "whereby" (in the expressive language of the Established Church) "it came to pass, that as before he was blessed, so now he was accursed; as before he was loved, so now he was abhorred; as before he was most beautiful and precious, so now he was most vile and wretched in the sight of his Lord and Maker; instead of the image of God, he was become the image of the devil; instead of the citizen of heaven, he was become the bond-slave of hell, having in himself no one part of his original purity and cleanness, but being altogether spotted and defiled; insomuch that he

now seemed to be nothing else but a lump of sin, and therefore, by the just judgment of God, was condemned to everlasting death." And as in "Adam all died," this curse fell not only on himself, but on his posterity and children for ever.

This is your condition, lost, ruined, and undone; but your Bible informs you, that God is merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; that he willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn unto him and live; it invites you to repentance, and holds out the hope of eternal salvation to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only way of acceptance and justification. "The offering of Christ once made, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual: and there is none other satisfaction for sin but that alone. It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

Because all men have broken the law of God, and incurred his righteous displeasure, it is impossible that any can be saved by his own works. All our most holy acts are polluted in the sight

of God, and can only be accepted by him through the mediation and intercession of a Saviour. Yet "when all hope of righteousness was past on our parts; when we had nothing in ourselves, whereby we might quench his burning wrath, and work the salvation of our souls; then, even then, did Christ, the Son of God, come down from heaven, to be wounded for our sakes—to be reputed with the wicked—to be condemned to death—to take upon him the reward of our sins—and to give his body to be broken on the cross for our offences, that we, by virtue of his blood shed upon the cross, and of his finished righteousness, imputed to us through faith in his atoning sacrifice, might be clean purged from our sins, and made righteous again in his sight. But the *devils* also believe and tremble; yet this is not that faith which worketh by love. And this true Christian faith hath no man, who, in the outward profession of his mouth, and in his outward receiving of the sacraments—in coming to the church, and in all other outward appearances, seemeth to be a Christian man, and yet in his living and deeds showing the contrary."

Thus you do see that the only mean and instrument of salvation required on our parts, is

"faith; that is to say, a sure trust and confidence in the mercies of God. Yet faith without works is dead: it is not faith, as a dead man is not a man. This dead faith, therefore, is not that sure and substantial faith which saveth sinners. But that faith which worketh by love is a quick and living faith. And this faith is not without hope and trust in God, nor without the love of God, and of our neighbours; nor without the fear of God; nor without the desire to hear God's word, and to follow the same in eschewing evil, and doing gladly all good works."*

From this brief summary of Christian doctrine, you will learn your own miserable condition, the necessity of repentance, humbling yourself before God, and crying to Him for mercy who alone can give you peace, rest, and quietness of conscience. These blessings he has promised to those who diligently seek him; not for their own merits, but of his great loving-kindness and tender mercies, for the sake of Christ Jesus, who was crucified, dead, and buried, that he might be made alive, fitted for an inheritance with the saints in light, and made heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. Un-

* Vide the Homilies *passim*.

speakably happy will you be, if you are brought seriously to reflect upon and embrace these great truths, by the influence of affliction; and earnestly to fly to Jesus for grace and strength, the forgiveness of sins, and conformity to his glorious image. No longer continue careless or indifferent; but implore the divine assistance, to lead and guide you into the way of all truth, and then, when the present cloud shall have passed away, you will have reason to rejoice in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

But I now turn to the Christian mourner, and offer to him the rich consolations provided in the Gospel. Your loss is indeed great: nature feels the dissolution of its tenderest attachments; let us then examine whence cometh your help: and may the God of peace fill your heart with peace and joy, a peace which passeth understanding, a joy which arises from the anticipation of the glory that shall be revealed in you, when these *light* afflictions shall have accomplished their design, even the sanctification of your souls.

It is the Lord's hand that is upon you; troubles do not spring from the dust; they are not brought about by fortuitous events, but are

commissioned by Infinite Wisdom to accomplish its designs. *He* knows, and sees, and orders what is best for you, and you may be assured that he doth all things well.

While we confine our views to the circumscribed sphere of our present vision, our minds are agitated and disturbed by a thousand vain regrets and foolish wishes. But when we contemplate every event of our lives as sent by God, and so nicely arranged and adjusted, that nothing can happen but through his permission, and *even* under his especial guidance and government, we are induced to exclaim, "It is the Lord. Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil? The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord. I was dumb with silence, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it. The Lord killeth and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up: the Lord maketh poor and maketh rich: he bringeth low and lifteth up. We will be still, and know that he is God; for the Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge."

When we look to him as the author of our sorrows, our minds become tranquil, our doubts

are removed, every gloomy presage is banished, the dark cloud is chased away, and the light of the sun of righteousness beams upon our solitary and benighted way, and shows that the path to happiness and heaven leads thither through much tribulation. We are no longer disturbed by the solicitude of anxious inquiry as to the causes by which such and such events have been brought about: for God condescends to appoint them, and from him should we receive them; assured, that if we are his people, we are immoveably secure amidst every changing scene.

God is the fountain of true comfort. But he can be so to *us* only in proportion as we can call him *our* God. Do we then feel satisfied that we are his children, that we love him because he first loved us; and that we are desirous of serving him, and living with a single eye to his glory? We can be happy under the severest trials; for we know that we are the objects of his especial favour and regard, and that nothing can hurt us, since the faithfulness of Jehovah is engaged to guide us through life, support us even in the dark valley of the shadow of death, and finally land us in the haven of immortal peace.

All things shall work together for good to those who fear *Him*. But the question naturally

occurs, Are we his people? and what right have we to appropriate these promises to ourselves? Surely we cannot be the objects of his divine compassion and love, when we are suffering his displeasure, when he is evincing against us the fierceness of his wrath? Yet beware of writing bitter things against yourselves, and tarnishing the lustre of Jehovah's immaculate purity and boundless compassion! Have you, with a deep conviction of your sinfulness and unworthiness, come to God, and sincerely entreated his forgiveness through the blood of Jesus? Have you embraced the Lord Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation, and as your only refuge? Have you fled to him, desirous of being washed in his blood, and made clean from your iniquities? Do you hate and avoid the practice and indulgence of sin? and do you earnestly implore the assistance of the Holy Spirit, to enable you to walk in his ways? Do you, from motives of love to him, seek after conformity to the image of your Saviour, and desire to advance his kingdom, and love his people on earth? Do you earnestly desire to devote your time and talents, your all, to his glory; and though you lament your daily imperfections, do you breathe after holiness, and

forgetting those things which are behind, do you strive to press forward towards the mark, for the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus? Then are you one of his people, however feeble and glimmering may be your faith; and as such you are interested in his care of his children.

"Sing, O heavens, and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains; for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted. But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee: behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands, thy walls are continually before me." The Almighty has promised that nothing shall hurt his children, for he is the rock of their salvation, and a sure defence in every time of need. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about those that fear him, to protect, guide, and comfort them. He has promised strength equal to their day, and by his Holy Spirit he supports the feeble and cheers the distressed.

When God afflicts, he has far higher designs

than simply to exemplify his compassion, his faithfulness, and his power in supporting under trials; he wishes his people to wear more of his image on their hearts, and to have their affections set on heavenly things. He is well acquainted with the secrets of all hearts: he sees and knows all that passes in the inmost bosom: nothing is concealed from his scrutiny. He perceives that your mind is occupied with earthly things, your affections fixed inordinately on some beloved object. He beholds you planting, nourishing, and watering with unremitting care, the gourd under which you have taken shelter, and in whose shade you allow your best affections to breathe out all their fragrance. He sees that all your attentions are directed to the support of this frail and lovely flower, and that you lose sight of the kind hand which *gave*, and which has hitherto *supported* its existence. You are indeed *anxious* for its welfare, but you do not look to God *alone* to bless it, and bless it to yourself. You are unmindful of Him to whom you should consecrate the blessing. The eye of *Infinite Goodness* perceives how your thoughts and affections are alienated from himself, and solely engaged in the present welfare of your darling idol. Most kindly then does *He* commis-

sion disease to blast your gourd, and you see it wither away and die before you.

And dost thou well to be angry? Alas! how foolish has been your conduct! You have been building plans of happiness for many years, on the creature of a day; and in one hour, all is cut down with a stroke. When you were busily engaged in preparing for yourself the cruel recollection of abused mercies, was it not an instance of almighty care, that he warned you of danger, and taught you the insufficiency of any thing but himself, to confer substantial happiness? He corrects, that you may deeply feel the sin and folly of your past conduct, and return unto him with full purpose of heart. Your earthly comforts are removed, in order that your hearts may be prepared for better and more enduring blessings, and that your souls may be left at liberty to be engaged about his service.

The Lord God will have all his children to be burning and shining lights in the world, to show forth his praise. He has not called them out of darkness into his marvellous light, in order that they may extinguish or conceal the light that is in them, or be like unto the feeble glimmering of the glow-worm; chiefly visible

during the gloomy night, chained to earth, and destined to illuminate its own little narrow sphere. But *He* wills that the principles of divine grace be nurtured and expanded into action, that they be wrought into habits, and exhibited to the praise of the glory of his grace. *He* wills that the Christian's light should teach the way to heaven, and show to others the beauty of holiness. His should be a life of constant activity and vigilance; for he has much to do, and soon the night cometh when no man can work. And he is concerned, not only that others, seeing his conduct, should glorify God, but that he himself should be nurtured for the heavenly world; and that, having been a light to others, he should at last shine as a star for ever in the firmament of glory.

Hence, he should be careful of his thoughts, his feelings, and affections; and anxious that they may be kept right with God, that the Almighty may be their centre and source. This cannot be, while he loves *excessively* any creature; and therefore God, in his great mercy, removes the fondly admired object which absorbs the soul, steals its richer faculties from heaven, and hides them in a vessel of clay. Thus the heart, which before was engrossed with earthly care,

is prepared for the reception of himself, and perfected for the heavenly glory above.

Is it not consoling, that the conduct of Jehovah is governed by such gracious designs towards you; and that you are entirely in the hands of one who so intimately knows what is best for you, and is able to do more and better for you than you can ask or think? His object in afflicting you is extensive and permanent. He wills that you commit yourselves entirely to his guidance and government; and he wishes to induce that frame of mind, in which you will make a distinct and entire surrender of yourself to him. He designs that the chief aim of your life should be to love and serve him; that his Spirit should abide in you and assist you in the performance of his will; that your dispositions, temper and frame of mind should be purified and directed towards Him whom you should supremely love and regard.

It will be of little avail to contemplate Jehovah's character as engaged to afford grace and strength to the sufferer, if we do not pray for devotedness to him. It is only to the humble, contrite soul that his blessings are given: and it is not easy to conceive the tranquillity, peace, and joy arising from a fixed and entire dedication to

his service. From the heart we desire to be his, and to live to his glory: we would know no other *first principle* of action than *love of him*: we can no longer be anxious about our concerns; for we are assured that all is in *his* hand, and therefore are we safe. We would earnestly desire to be more entirely his, and to love and serve him better. We would commit our way unto the Lord, and seek to glorify him with our bodies and with our spirits. *He* who inhabiteth eternity will take care of us: he asks for our heart, and we will give it him unreservedly; for *then*, and *then only*, shall we enjoy tranquillity: we shall rejoice in the God of our salvation, who voluntarily and graciously undertakes to relieve us of every burden, and to give us peace.

No tranquillity can be compared with the peace of God, the calm serenity diffused over the whole soul, by a reliance on his goodness, and obedience to his commands. When the paroxysms of grief recur, when the mind is agitated by the retrospect of its lost happiness, and by the contemplation of the fearful evils with which it is environed; if the mourner comes to God, and in humble faith seeks comfort alone from him, *he* will give it, *he* will manifest himself to the soul, so as to fill its vast desires; he will

allay the aching heart and tranquillize the troubled bosom, with his cheering and sustaining presence, and with the brightening prospects of eternity.

The consolations of God are however to be expected only in obedience to his will, and we must be careful that we do not grieve the Spirit of God, by murmuring, or calling in question the righteousness of his proceedings. This, indeed, would invalidate our claim to comfort; while, if we wait upon God in the way of his appointment, in due time we shall reap, if we faint not. And we shall reap, not only present comfort and support from Him who can give us a name and a place better than of sons or daughters, but that peace which arises from the hope of our interest in the pardoning love and favour of God; that consolation which is founded on Christ as our Mediator, Intercessor, and Advocate; that cordial support which originates from the influence of the principles of religion; that calm and holy joy which owes its birth to the prospects, the glorious anticipations with which we are surrounded: "for I reckon that these light afflictions are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall follow. For which cause we faint not: but though our

outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."*

But we rejoice in the *end* which affliction is accomplishing in us. It is preparing us to glorify God, and for an abundant entrance into that rest which he has provided for those who, through much tribulation, have washed their robes in the blood of the Lanb, and now inherit the kingdom. It is the discipline by which we are taught to regard God as our chief good. We learn the frailty of our own nature, the folly of departing from him, and of resting in any other source of happiness. It will purify and exalt our graces, that, thus fitted for breathing the purer atmosphere of the heavenly world, these themselves may be the spring of more abundant happiness, where perfect pleasure dwells.

Afflictions well sustained prove a source of comfort even on earth, from the manifestation of the glory and grace of God; while they endure but for an instant of time, and will soon be swal-

* 2 Cor. iv. 16, 17, 18.

lowed up in praise, in an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. While the Christian thus looks beyond the narrow boundary of mortality, and catches a glimpse of the heavenly state, he is ready to endure even *far more*, that he may win Christ and be found in him. He is concerned to glorify God, and anxious that his heart should be elevated above present pains and sorrows, and fixed on those eternal things, during our steady regard on which *only*, it is, that we can expect to derive benefit from the exercise of sorrow. Let us then earnestly look to God as the author of every affliction, and derive unfeigned consolation from the recollection, that, as such, *He* afflicts in wisdom and love, that he is engaged to uphold us, that he chastens us for our good, that he is ever with us, and prepares us for a residence with himself in the kingdom of glory.

Consolation is again to be derived from the nature of the comfort you have lost. At best, it was a mortal blessing! You could have enjoyed it but for a short time longer; and even this enjoyment would have been intermingled with many tears of sorrow, which your dearest friend will now escape; and would have been interrupted and impaired by a thousand troubles

and disquietudes, which will now be avoided. The blessing you have lost is of a temporal nature, and you now feel how much you were attached to it; how deeply rooted were your affections, not simply on the object of your fondest hopes, but ramifying most extensively on this lower soil. Many points of attachment to the earth are now cut off: many sources from which you derived supplies of present pleasure are dried up; you have fewer attractions to the world, and your most valued treasures are removed to heaven: and "where the treasure is, there will the heart be also." Yes! your hearts will still love to follow your beloved relatives, and delight in anticipating the possession of heavenly *felicity*. Thus will you be aiming after conformity to a dear Redeemer, that you may be with him, and with his children: and you will not only find that your spiritual pleasures are undiminished, but that they are increased. All the *pure* sources of present happiness are left untouched, nay, are purified and enlarged: for, will not your capacity to love God, your delight in his service, your humility, your confidence, your faith, your hope, be magnified and established, when your heart is thus raised to another and a better world?

Besides, you are feelingly taught the important lesson, that there is no rest on earth, and that disquietude and care are ready to mar your happiest moments. The spirit of your dearest friend has fled from the uneasiness of a longer pilgrimage on earth, to a place of safety and of rest; has escaped the trials which are necessary to remind us, we have no abiding city here; and has for ever bidden adieu to the gloomy cares with which the imperfection of our nature had encumbered its path through this world's wide wilderness. You have sustained the loss of a beloved object, which too probably was the means of dividing your heart, and weaning your affections from God: and thus are you prepared to receive him with your whole heart, to remember thy first love, "to remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do thy first work:" and are excited to "be watchful and strengthen the things that remain, and are ready to die;" that when your Lord cometh, you may be found watching. You have lost a present comfort: yet a wise and merciful God overrules for good this afflictive event, and makes it the instrument of bringing you to enjoy far greater and imperishable pleasures.

But, again, a great source of consolation is pre-

sented to the affectionate heart, in the immediate perfect happiness of him who has been removed. How inexpressibly joyful must be the transition! Only conceive of the infinite surprise of the holy, happy, disembodied spirit; perhaps, suddenly translated from earth to heaven, scarcely even tasting of death, and quickly winging its flight across the dark and unknown valley, to realms of everlasting day; this hour wandering on earth in perfect health, and, though surrounded with trials and difficulties, imploring its *Maker* for guidance and assistance in keeping his ways; the next, sleeping in the bosom of a compassionate Saviour; in a moment swept away from all these vain and transitory scenes, and introduced to the society of the blessed, with, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Or conceive of the ravages of disease, slowly depriving the cheek of its crimson hue of health, undermining the powers of the constitution, and impairing the activity of that body which was lately subservient to the volitions of an active, intelligent, affectionate, and pious mind. The animal powers are fast verging to decay, and ere long the principle of vitality must be extinguished. Yet even now, the Christian rises

above disease, and though his outward man decay, his inward strength is renewed day by day; he bears an ample testimony to the goodness of God, and to the supporting influence of the truths of the Gospel, for he knows in whom he has believed, and is persuaded, that he is able to keep that which he has committed to him, unto the last day. Even in the closing scene, though he may not die triumphant, yet his hopes and joys are fixed on God; his faith and confidence in the atoning merits of a Redeemer's sacrifice. The happy spirit, though it still linger on the confines of morality, is pluming its wings to soar above:

"The nearer still she draws to land,
The more her sacred joys expand;
With steady helm, and well-bent sail,
Her anchor drops within the veil!
Triumphant now she claps her wings,
And her celestial sonnet sings,
Glory to God!"

Sin has no longer any influence to damp the joy, and interrupt the prospects of the soul. Faith is exchanged for sight, prayer for praise, expectation for fruition. There is no darkness now; for he sees God, sees him as he is, is con-

formed to his image, and filled with his glory. It is impossible to conceive, much more *depict*, the felicity of the disembodied spirit, at once freed from all the shackles of mortality, and delighting in the service of the Most High: all its faculties, its powers, and its affections centering in him, purified and sublimed, and exercised on a scale the most comprehensive, unlimited, and eternal.

Only conceive of the happiest moments you ever spent on earth with our dear friend now in heaven; those in which, prostrated before the throne of God, in social yet private worship, you joined hands and hearts in mutually supplicating the favour of Jehovah, and the best blessings of his smiles on your undertakings for his service. Conceive of that sweetest communion of souls which you have participated; (how did your hearts burn within you, with love to God, and to each other!) and the entire exemption you have enjoyed, from every jarring sound. How sweet is the recollection of those few happy moments! now infinitely dear to memory! Yet if you endeavour to multiply these joys with all the powers of your mind, you will fall incalculably short of the actual blessedness of heaven; for eye hath not seen,

nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of a man to conceive the joys which are reserved for the people of God.

And this blessedness is eternal: it knows no change, is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. Into this joy your friend has entered; and as you loved him on earth with disinterested affection, are you not consoled by this delightful prospect? Nay, do you not rejoice to part with *your own* ease, that he may be happy? Is it not *happiness* to know that he is "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest?" Yes, it is—you would not wish him back again; you prefer his happiness to your own, and only desire to follow him: you recollect his present peace, and are comforted.

God has graciously removed one of his tender feeble lambs; has promised to keep it in his bosom; to cherish it, and restore it to you at his appointed time. He has taken it away from the evil to come. Jesus says, "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." In Jesus, too, your dear friend has been made more than conqueror, and has escaped the tribulations of a protracted warfare: he has escaped from his own frailties, and has exchanged the infirmities

of our nature, for glory, honour, and immortality.

Though he be no more seen upon earth, though his place be vacant in the sanctuary, though there be none to occupy his useful station, and none to fill his domestic relations, yet he is not lost; he is not dead, but sleepeth; he ever liveth and reigneth with the saints in light. He dwells not upon earth, but lives in immortality, in the immediate presence of God, and the service of the Redeemer. Sorrow is no longer known to the blissful inhabitant of a heavenly world: sin is for ever banished; disease and death are known no more, and can no longer impair the activity of the soul: the understanding is not fettered by the cumbrous medium of clay, through which it receives its exterior notices; the heart is no longer throbbing with woe, nor agitated and disturbed by a thousand painful feelings and conflicting passions, but animated solely with the love of God:

> "The tears are all wiped from those eyes,
> And evil they never shall see."

The understanding is enlarged to comprehend what is the height, and breadth, and length, and depth of the love of God; the heart is expanded

to feel alone its unbounded influence; and the whole soul is fitted and prepared, and all its powers and faculties are rendered capable of relishing the joys of the heavenly state, of adoring, loving, serving, and praising God.

Though absent from the body, he is for ever present with the Lord: he has joined the song of the redeemed above, and has united in ascribing praises to the Lamb that was slain. No longer worn by disease, distressed by affliction, assailed by temptation or haunted by sin, there is full enjoyment for the expanded heart, in the worship of God. He is present with his Redeemer, with *Him* who became a ransom for many, suffered the wrath of God for the sins of his people, and gave himself for them, that they through *Him* might find acceptance with God: with *Him*, who has been his God, his father, and his friend; his guide through life, his support under trials and distresses, his everlasting portion in the midst of every changing scene; his hope, and all-sufficient Saviour in the last hour of death: with *Him* who has been his joy, and is now become his exceeding great reward: with *Him* in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

From the contemplation of this state of end-

less bliss, you are led forward to reflect on the present perfection of the capacities of the deceased. With pure and chastened delight, you have loved and admired the character of your dear friend while on earth. The mild and varied intelligence of a well-stored mind; the meek, disinterested affection of a heart formed for tenderness, and moulded by religion; the benevolence of his disposition; his amiable temper; the rectitude of his principles; his fear of God, and obedience to his commands; his delight in *his* service, and desire of living to his glory; the excellence of his conduct, and his unremitting exertions to be constantly doing good to all the poor, needy, afflicted, and wandering in his sphere—formed so many points of attraction, on which you delighted to dwell with increasing satisfaction. And yet, with all these excellencies, your dear friend's was not a perfect character. An impartial recollection of all he said and did, will mark visible imperfection; will show that the soul was still militant on earth, and affected by a variety of external circumstances, and these too frequently and too intimately allied to human depravity, though continually deplored and opposed as the consequence of indwelling sin.

Contemplate now the state of the soul: its

perceptions quickened and enlarged; its affections directed to their proper centre; its faculties wholly employed in the service of God; its dispositions and actions purified and exalted; the sphere of its sensations changed from earth to heaven, and their nature now divine; no longer subject to the inroads of pain and sin: all which beautified the character on earth, all which made it estimable, all which constituted it lovely in your eyes, is rendered absolutely perfect by its translation to heaven. Conceive, then, of these same amiable traits still in exercise, with the addition of inconceivable purity: and do you not feel, that, although dead, he yet speaks, and thinks, and feels? Do you not love him still, for the reasons you loved him on earth? Is not your affection increased by his present holy, happy state? Do you not find it a source of pleasure, still to love that which was imperishable, that which was heavenly about him? and do you not derive a large fund of consolation from this exercise of affection! A ray of heavenly joy gilds your solitary hours, and illumines your path through this dark wilderness; guiding you by its chastened light to the mansions of the blest.

Yet there is another feature of the present

state of the deceased, which deserves your notice; —*they sleep in Jesus.* Death is frequently represented as a sleep; and under this beautiful similitude, we are informed that it is only a temporary cessation of hostility, and of the vital principle, preparatory to some new state of existence, of which we can form at best but an inadequate idea. As, during sleep, the immaterial principle within us, remains still active and vigilant; so, during the long night of death, the soul, freed from the prison of the body, is ever active in its sweet employment just described. The powers of volition, and perception of external objects, have ceased from the body: it is dead, it is now a nothing, and will soon be removed from our sight. Yet what affectionate heart is there, that does not delight to linger over the body of his departed relative? Memory loves to trace in the affectionate intelligent smile, which still hovers around the lips, and which not even death itself can yet destroy, the delightful peace with which the soul quitted its tenement of clay, as well as the testimony of endeared affection to surviving relatives, which indicates that the last thought on earth was that of *love for them*, and anticipated joy on the very confines of eternity. Who does not delight to retrace in imagination,

what the expressive eye, sparkling with delight, lately told of all its feelings, its cares, and joys? or contemplate that form consecrated by a thousand endeared recollections; and of which, every wonted object of participated pleasure now seems but as a sad memento? Yes! feeble nature shrinks from the sad parting even of this lifeless clay: though the soul be gone, it rejoices to dwell, and infuse imaginary activity into each limb and every feature: hence the reluctance with which we commit the body to the narrow cheerless cell appointed for all the living.

Yet hush the murmuring thought! Thy dearly beloved friend only *sleeps* in Jesus: he is shrouded in the arms of a Saviour's love, who died and rose again, that all his followers might. Jesus watches over the bodies of his saints, and will keep them until the last great day of retribution. Our blessed Lord himself tasted of death, though he could not be subjected by it, and he has perfumed the grave by his presence. Shall we then fear to commit our dear friend to that tomb where Jesus lay, and whence he rose triumphant, leading "captivity captive," and trampling over that last enemy, even death: "for, this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So, when

this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory: O Death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."* Jesus "is the resurrection and the life." Through him, that which you now commit to the grave, shall be raised at the last day, in his image, to sanctification and honour. Thus your dear friend will only slumber till the morning of the resurrection; for, if we "believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For, since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For, as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." And the glorious change it will undergo, is thus described in the beautiful, simple,

* 1 Cor. xv. &c.

and energetic language of the Apostle: "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit, that was not first, which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly."*

This is the glorious prospect revealed through Christ Jesus, and reserved for those who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation. You bid adieu to the body of your dearest relative, but it is only for a time. It remains in its chrysalis state for the appointed period, and then rises under new forms and combinations, which indeed we cannot exactly trace,

* 1 Cor. xv.

but infinitely glorious, and like to Christ's glorified body. In the arms of a kind Saviour it will rest, till the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible. Thus faith descries infinite glories as the result of this apparent disorganization of the animal frame: it beholds new scenes breaking upon the astonished view; it commits the keeping of the body as unto a faithful Creator in well-doing; it leaves its earthly all in His hands, who openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth, and no man openeth.

The Christian looks at death as the prelude of eternity. "Thou fool, that which thou sowest, is not quickened except it die." In this beautiful similitude, we find even the appearance of death disarmed of all its terror. The seed is thrown into the ground; it is hidden from our sight; but by and bye, we are surprised to see the tender blade: it has assumed a new form of existence; and, though visited by the wintry blast, though again concealed from our sight by the hoar frost and the snow, it is preserved, and prepared by this long night of comparative inactivity, for future fertility and beauty. "We all do fade as a leaf:" we pass the summer of life, and when visited by the autumnal gale, we

wither, droop, and fall away from our earthly connexions. But this is not the termination of existence; for, as the leaf falls, and undergoes its change of phytoseptic decay, it is prepared to assume new forms of existence, and destined soon again to appear with increased beauty: so man, when he drops into the grave, is undergoing that change which will prepare him for existence in a heavenly world. Let us however remember, that as the richness of autumnal foliage far exceeds the summer's beauty, so should the evening of life increase in worth, and evince a greater degree of heavenly-mindedness, and conformity to the will of God; so, in approaching the winter of death, and when the head is already silvered o'er with the frost of age, should the heart exemplify that its inspirations are derived from a heavenly source.

If we consider man as a complicated machine, admirably fitted for the performance of every function to which his situation calls him; or if we look at him as an intellectual being, and contemplate the vast resources of his mind, we are filled with wonder and admiration. Yet this is man in the infant state of his existence, as the creature of mortality, as a rational rather than

as a spiritual being. But go a little forward: the cold hand of death pales that cheek which once glowed with vivacity; the expressive eye is now sunk in its lifeless orbit; the heart, once the seat of the warmest affections, no longer beats, no longer flutters with joy or throbs with anxiety; the animated intelligence of the countenance has given place to ceaseless absence of expression; the mind no longer dwells there; and those active limbs once obedient to that mind, now are stiff, cold, and inanimate. The lifeless corpse is soon shrouded, it is placed in its narrow habitation, and entombed. We see it no more. But though the Christian cannot explore the wintry sleep of death, yet he knows and feels that this last closing scene of existence is but preparatory to brighter prospects.

The immortal spirit still exists; and though the body slumbers in the tomb, yet, when the night of death is past, it will be raised incorruptible; it will be reunited with its kindred spirit; it will be received into heaven; all the faculties and affections of the soul will be purified and enlarged, and its happiness completed. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord: they rest from all their labours, and their works do follow them.—May I die the death of the

righteous, and may my latter end be like his!"

Such is the limited nature of our faculties, that it is not easy to conceive of the joys of the heavenly state: yet that there is such a *state of happiness*, and that it is adapted to the full expansion of the intellectual powers, has been revealed to us. Still we are unable to understand its glories, or to form adequate and correct ideas of half its blessedness: we can but approximate towards the truth, and must be contented to know but in part. We are assured, that it is a rest prepared for the people of God; and that its chief employment will consist in loving him with unwearied alacrity and increasing delight. While we acknowledge the inadequacy of our faculties to conceive of this blissful region, there is no impropriety in contemplating the happy land, to which I trust we are hastening; in following thither, in imagination, the spirit of our departed relative, and anticipating the measure of our knowledge there.

Fond affection anxiously inquires, if it shall again see and *know* the dear object of its joy on earth; and appears to derive support from this delightful hope On what grounds it may be entertained, will appear from the following ob-

servations. *Heaven is a state adapted to the entire perfection of the intellectual powers;* and these, freed from all impurity and every incumbrance, will be placed on their proper objects. These, while man continued in a state of innocence, were such as in their exercise to constitute him *happy.* By the fall they have become debased: and by their alliance with the body, and the intrusion of sin, their powers are incumbered and weakened, while the objects of their pursuit are frequently improper. But when the soul shall have bidden adieu to this vain scene, when it shall have ascended to realms of celestial glory, and the disembodied spirit shall have been transformed into the image of its Redeemer; then all its powers will be enlarged, and tend, in one uniform current, to the glory of that Being whose presence constitutes the delight of the blessed; it will look back on its past life, and admire the unsearchable riches of grace and of divine love: it will be able to comprehend the reason and the wisdom of the dealings of God, and will contemplate with delight *his* long-suffering patience and loving kindness, and tender mercies.

Its joys will he derived from the same source as on earth; only that *here* we see as through a

glass darkly, while *there* we shall no longer live by faith, but sight: we shall no longer experience the weakness we have felt below, but shall be enabled to love and praise God with the whole heart. The exercise of the intellectual functions is not *confined to one object*, though they will ultimately *tend exclusively* to the Supreme Being, and finally centre in him. Thus, unquestionably, the happiness of heaven will be enhanced by participation, by sharing with others its pleasures and its services. There too, perhaps, the happy spirit, when disengaged from the body, busies itself in watching over those forms, to which it was attached on earth by the tenderest ties: it is probably one of its cares and joys, in the capacity of a guardian angel, to watch over and protect the endeared mortal with whom it was formerly associated in love as pure, in affection as exalted, as mortality could reach.

Perhaps we have no direct instance of the kind in the Sacred Writings. Yet it is surely not unfair to infer, that the same cause which augments the misery of those who are banished from the presence of God, will add to the happiness of the blessed: and of these causes, none are more powerful than perception and reflection.

The rich man, being in torments, lift up his eyes, and beheld Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." *

In this emphatic appeal on the part of the rich man, we may descry a consciousness of the felicity of Lazarus, or he could not render him assistance; and increased power of the understanding to discern Abraham and Lazarus; the power of reflection on the folly of his own past conduct, and the exercise of affection for his brethren, that they might escape his torments. On the part of Abraham, the great gulf fixed between him and the rich man, forms an obstacle to the relief prayed for; thus certainly admitting the inference, that, although the miserable are excluded from the kind offices of angels in heaven, yet, that this may not be the case with the righteous, over whom God has given his angels charge.

If it be allowed that these were sources of anguish to the unhappy spirit, and that their exercise, under different circumstances, might

* Luke. xvi. 19, 31.

augment the felicity of the just, it surely will not be asserted, that these additions of happiness are denied to the blessed spirit. Hence it is presumed that the powers of the soul are engaged, and do derive pleasure from being engaged, on objects of affection still left behind it on earth; and, therefore, unless by some subsequent change (which is quite inconceivable) these powers may have been extinguished, there will be a *continuance of their exercise*, when the happy spirits shall be re-united in realms of bliss. There can be nothing improbable in this supposition, and there appears to be strong ground for believing its reality: for if the spirit, in its present separate state, be allowed to exercise purified affection towards the relatives it has left behind, such as, united to the body, would have been termed *social*, why may not the same principles continue in action, and form part of the happiness of the blest, when re-united around the throne of God? Man was created upright, in the image of God; by the fall, he lost that image: but when the spirit returns to God who gave it, it is made like unto the image of its Saviour, it resembles, in its purity and principles, what it first was, when emanating from the Deity.

That we shall know and love each other hereafter, as those whom we have known, and admired, and loved on earth, may be inferred from the 2d of Samuel, and the 12th chapter; where David, after the decease of his beloved child, exclaims with genuine lively faith, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." Nor does this allude simply to partaking the same happiness in heaven: for if this were the meaning of the passage, why is the personal pronoun alone employed? David might have said, in confidence of happiness hereafter, I shall go where he is, but he shall not return to me; though even then, the last clause would seem to designate a *personal* interview. And when this is conjoined with the strong expression, "I shall go to *him*," there appears to remain no doubt that he uttered these words under the impression that he should have a personal knowledge of his child in a future world: and from its connexion with the former part of the passage, this anticipation seems to have formed, with David, a principle source of consolation under his affliction.

This knowledge of each other may be likewise inferred from Luke ix. 28, et seq.; where the Evangelist, in describing the transfiguration

of our Lord upon the mount, observes, that there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias. "And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said." Here Peter, and doubtless also James and John, knew Moses and Elias; they knew them, not merely as happy spirits, but individually. And this proves more than simple knowledge; for, if we recognize each other in a future world, in addition to the complacency we must feel towards all the blissful inhabitants of that heavenly, peaceful region, there can be little doubt, from a consideration of the preceding argument, that we shall love each other individually; that affection entertained on earth will be elevated, purified, and renewed in a fairer world of spirits.

The exercise of affection is not that which pertains *solely* to our *fallen* nature, and is superinduced by it; but it is a principle of the soul's action; it is that which elevates us the nearest to our great Pattern and Redeemer, which employs the purest, the most sublimated energies of the immortal mind. Affection was exercised in a

state of innocence, and it constituted the greater portion of the happiness of Paradise; and that, not from being diffused over all the works of creation, (for the whole must have appeared amiable,) but from its being concentrated on one object. Nor does it at all appear, that this affection was inimical to the love of God. Hence, individual affection may exist in a future life, and flow uniformly from, and be enhanced by, the affections centering supremely in God.

A state of innocence is the nearest approach to a future state of happiness, but still falls far short of its glories. If, however, we behold pure affection, a source of pleasure in this vain and transitory scene, and if we then endeavour to form an adequate conception of the measure of happiness thus produced in a state of perfect purity, we shall irresistibly be led forward another gradation in the scale of bliss; we shall cast our eyes on future scenes; when, added to a state of freedom from guilt, the spirit shall be relieved from the shackles imposed on it by the body; and all the affections purified, and their object exalted, their exercise shall be again renewed, with an inconceivable accession of felicity.

This fact appears also from the consideration

of that disciple whom *Jesus loved;* and the example of our dear Redeemer will not be deemed one in which the frailties and deformities of human nature were commixed. This love was pure, pure as the source from which it flowed. *He* who now liveth and reigneth and intercedeth for us, who gave himself a ransom for the sins of his people, no doubt loved them with an everlasting, an unchanging love. *He* who loved *all* his disciples, affords us an instance of particular affection, of pure exalted love, not founded on the low considerations of mortality, but during to all eternity. This love we find testified after his resurrection, and immediately before his ascension to heaven, his reception to glory: nor can we then doubt, that individual affection may be exercised by pure intelligences.

Our affections are not changed, but purified, exalted in their object, and enlarged in their capacity. When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality; then all that is sinful, base, sordid, and selfish, every impure admixture shall be taken away, and disinterested benevolence shall animate the heart. The present capacities and faculties of the soul are indestructible: and but that they shall be deprived of every cha-

racteristic and distinctive feature, which they derive from the *combination of our spiritual and animal nature*, they will remain unchanged. Love without alloy will animate every bosom; and its great object will be that gracious, glorious, holy Being, before whom angels veil their faces, and to whom they are engaged in ceaseless ascriptions of praise. Love will fill the whole soul; and those affections which on earth so feebly tended towards God, will now expand in the ripening atmosphere of heaven, to the full-blown maturity of joy and peace.

But will this love to God diminish our affection for those who bear his image? No: it cannot destroy, but it will augment, it will render more intense that love, which here we exercised towards his people, and particularly towards some individuals. We love God more, because the hindrances to our affection are removed: and as our desires here were characterized, though so imperfectly, by love to Him; so will they still converge to their proper object, and will become intense, in proportion as their capacity is increased. The same purifying and exalting cause, which rouses ardent affection towards God, will equally rekindle love to the happy beings around us.

Since, then, there is no change in the *nature or tendency* of the affections; but only that those previously existing on earth, debased by sin, and chained down to sense, are emancipated and exalted; it is reasonable to suppose that we shall exercise similar principles in our intercourse in heaven. Indeed, when kindred spirits have been united here below, have participated each other's hearts, have travelled together in the road to Zion, have only parted for a short season on the narrow verge of eternity; when this mutual affection has had its basis in love to God, and has been influenced by it; the change which the disembodied spirit must undergo, in order to exclude the reaction of such a principle, so consonant with its nature and so agreeable to the love of God, is absolutely inconceivable.

If the love of God animate our bosoms; if we really are the sincere followers of Christ, and heirs with him of the kingdom and glory, then shall we love his people, in so far as they resemble their great Pattern, for his sake whose image they bear enstamped upon their hearts, and whose laws are written in their lives. We shall love the people of God, wherever we meet with them, in whatever nation, or people, or tongue, and however divided into sects and

parties, for Him, whose name they revere, and to whose cross they look alone for salvation.

But we may go a step higher. Suppose natural and Christian affection to have been superadded to this love to the people of God *as such*, and that the most endearing relationship shall have subsisted; that the Christian's cares, and joys, and sorrows, shall have been participated; and that perfect harmony, and a single mutual desire to do good, shall have formed the prominent character of the union; this is the most engaging form of that love which animates the heart towards the people of God. There may be then, modified by circumstances, *different degrees of the same principle* in exercise; and this affection will be more pure and more substantial in proportion as the union is *more and more spiritual.* But it is a spiritual union *only*, which we shall hereafter sustain. Let us then look beyond the grave, and anticipate, that the love which warmed our hearts here below, shall fill the heart hereafter.

In heaven we shall love God without interruption; and that love will necessarily animate us with affection for others, for the blissful inhabitants of that holy place. But as it is allowed that our happiness will be increased by the recol-

lection of our past difficulties and trials, and of our transition from a world of care to a world of bliss; so will it be granted that we shall experience an accession of delight, from uniting our praises to those with whom we have associated; and that the measure of the happiness we shall derive from this source, will be in proportion to the nearness, and the spiritual nature, of the connexion which subsisted on earth. Thus will it constitute a portion of our pleasures, to meet in heaven those endeared relatives towards whom the greatest affection was exercised on earth; the recollection and reflection on which, will heighten our felicity, and contribute to augment our peace and joy.

We shall experience additional pleasure from loving and praising God *together*. Let us entertain exalted ideas of that blissful state; but let us appreciate its blessings when we can, and as they deserve. Participation enhances pleasure: and our happiness in the heavenly state will be increased by the myriads of happy beings around us; and still more so, by the safety of those we have loved, and esteemed, and delighted in below, who almost constituted a part of ourselves. Does not then the hope of the resurrection afford most abundant consolation to the

mourner? Its glorious realities should be constantly before him, and mitigate his sorrows.

The present scenes will soon be lost: human life is but as a shadow which quickly passes away; it is a tale which is soon told; it is a journey, which, although we cannot descry its termination, we shall soon accomplish, and we cannot tell how soon. But this we know, that the brevity of human life will quickly re-unite those whom death divides. At no very distant period, you will be visited by wan disease, stretched on the bed of sickness, and finally be no more seen upon earth. While, however, this delightful prospect animates and consoles you, remember, that, though to die and be with Christ, is infinite "gain," yet to abide on earth during his will, is far better." Life is the time to serve God, to show forth his praise, and prepare for eternity; and though it may be very lawful to indulge ardent expectations of your removal from its cares and sorrows; yet this becomes sinful, *because excessive*, when it renders you unduly anxious to depart, even "to be with Christ."

Be assured, that when you *fretfully* long to be delivered from the present scenes of trouble, you are not fitted to enter into the kingdom of heaven. You are not entirely willing to do

and to suffer the will of God here; and consequently are incapable of yielding that perfect obedience and submission to him, which the society and happiness of heaven demand. Earnestly check the first impatient thought; for this *indulged*, may teach you to murmur and repine. Your great security depends on loving God, and serving him with your whole soul: thus will you be preparing for heavenly felicity, and ripening fast for the kingdom of glory. When, therefore, you look forward to this glorious change, it must be with *submission to the will of God*, and desiring to know and do every thing within the compass of your talents to promote his honour, and to accomplish all the good pleasure of his will.

It is delightful to the Christian, when suffering affliction, to reflect that very soon all his sorrows will be soothed, when death is swallowed up in victory. The approach of this relentless tyrant is despoiled of terror to him: he knows that his Redeemer liveth, and that he has conquered death: he looks to the last scene of dissolution as the peaceful avenue leading to eternal happiness: he welcomes the approach of his kindest friend, and he sinks into his arms with calm composure, "in sure and certain hope of a resurrection unto life eternal."

How kind a Saviour thus to have spoiled death of its sting, to have softened all its terrors, to have rendered its approach desirable! How gracious to have removed those nearest friends, to have left whom would have clouded the last lingering moments of life; but who, as they are gone before us, now serve to call our affections to heaven, and to render the prospect of dissolution most welcome. Now, indeed, death triumphs over all your dearest comforts; it has robbed you of your richest and purest earthly treasure; it has laid your hopes in the dust; has exhibited the fallacy of your anticipations of *immediate* futurity by the removal of him who was your guide and comfort, during the gloomy darkened hours you spent on earth. Yet remember that he exhibited only a borrowed light reflected from the Sun of righteousness; and that he is now gone to illuminate another hemisphere, and to shine in realms of glory. Soon, very soon, the day shall break upon you; the day-star shall dawn upon your heart, and the Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings, give you peace, and guide you to immortal glory. Soon you shall triumph over the last enemy! Death shall be swallowed up in victory! Now, indeed, you are under its influence, but you will

ere long escape its power. Now he causes you to feel his iron sway; but when he aims the fatal shaft which is to take you from life, he will find he has no power but on the body: the spirit will wing its flight to realms of day: and though the poor remains of what once was animate, may moulder into dust, yet soon, from the ashes of this beauteous frame, will arise a more beautiful, glorious, and spiritual body; which, at the last resurrection, shall be again united to the soul, and awake triumphant from the chains of death: "for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption."

This union will take place in a state of purity. The soul will be perfected, its perceptions rendered acute, and its capacities enlarged to taste its fulness of joy. No care, no sorrow, no perplexity will have admission there; *there* will be no difference of opinion, no necessity for the exercise of forbearance, no indulgence of depraved principles, no sin, no unbelief, no coldness of affection towards God; but all will be love! No longer disturbed by trials and solicitudes, we shall "rest unmolested" in the bosom of our God and Saviour.

This happiness will be as everlasting as it is

perfect. It will endure to all eternity; and when countless years shall have passed away, when the power of numbers shall, by the utmost stretch of finite capacity, be exhausted, eternity will be but begun. There will be no interruption of blessedness, for every possible cause of infelicity will be removed. There will be no more parting. A thousand accidents on earth, prevent the enjoyment of friendship's balm, separate those whose hearts are united, and circumscribe the exercise of the affections. *There* every conceivable facility will be afforded to the eternal growth of celestial love; love, ever on the increase; adding to the solid pleasures of the inhabitants of heaven, and filling up the unlimited measure of their pure and peaceful hours. There will be no death there; *now* the cause of our severest woe, but, as we shall then see, only the friendly harbinger of everlasting joy. From this last enemy we shall then be free, and happy in the knowledge that nothing can invade our peace.

Whilst on earth, if a transient gleam of joy flit across our lives, it is embittered by the immediate prospect of succeeding woe, and the extreme uncertainty attending the continuance of our enjoyments. We can never be free from pain in possession, or anticipated reversion. But

there, we shall have no present thought but love, no prospect but of inviolable security. Sheltered from every storm, we shall repose under the tree of life, and hymn the praises of the Lamb, saying, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." There shall we be "before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither shall they thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

With these glorious prospects opening upon his inquiring view, the Christian will be consoled, the mourner will be comforted and upheld, he will no longer contemplate the pallid lifeless corpse, as the last dull remains of all his happiness: he will no longer confine his view to the grave, which will soon shroud even this beloved relic from his sight: but he will look forward to the infinite joys which are beyond his ken, and far exceed his utmost conceptions. He will fix

his eyes on those glories which are now in the possession of his departed relative. He will no longer dwell with sad remembrance on the agonizing scenes which were the precursors, and the immediate consequences of dissolution: but he will follow the happy spirit to heaven, where it is adorned with an imperishable crown of eternal life and glory; an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away. He looks at the deceased, as now, more than ever, the object of his affection, because more beautiful and excellent; he recollects with unspeakable joy, that all his happiness is derived from an unchanging fountain of peace from God alone, and from the fruition of his immediate presence and blessing. To him, every source of uneasiness has failed; the heart has been lightened of every sorrow; every anxiety has been removed; not a single wish unfulfilled, not a want unsupplied, not a fear remaining; every imperfection has been entirely done away; and every affection perfected to love and serve God, to know and do his will, to live to his praise. The mourner will no longer delight to dwell with mortality; but, as his affections will be fixed on heaven, he will be preparing for an abundant entrance into the kingdom of his Father. He will familiarize himself with

death; will seek to welcome its approach, and desire so to live, that he may die in the arms of his Saviour. He will labour more earnestly after a well-grounded hope of his salvation: and though he may, through fear of death, be subject to bondage; though he may dread the last struggle, yet he places all his hope on God alone, and trusts in him for support, who alone can give it; for, when the flesh and heart shall fail, God shall be his support and stay, and his portion for ever.

And after all we have done, we fall infinitely short in our conceptions of the glory and the happiness of heaven. We are passing through Immanuel's land to mansions in the sky: and if, with faith in lively exercise, we occasionally catch a distant glimpse of the joys prepared for us, still our vision is obscured, we see nothing distinctly, and our most fervent anticipations fall far short of the reality. We perceive, indeed, enough to engage our attention, and awaken our love and desire. Yet, when we are walking through the dark valley of the shadow of death, perhaps our prospects partake of the gloom with which we are surrounded, and we can scarcely appreciate the excellent glory to be revealed in us. Soon, the night of dissolution will pass away; we are almost landing on the blissful shores of eternity; we

shall enter into the rest which remaineth for the people of God; and we shall find ever new and increasing objects of delight crowd upon us, and fill us with admiration and joy ten thousand times greater than we could have conceived. May we prepare for that rest! and may Jesus put underneath us his everlasting arms, enable us *now* to realize its glories, and finally bring us to possess its unfading felicities!

It is the surest wisdom to lay the foundation of our consolation in God, with whom we can only become intimately acquainted, by perusing the revelation of his will. Hence the afflicted will come to this source of solid comfort, and will earnestly and humbly seek that the Spirit of Grace may apply its consoling promises, its simple precepts, and its glorious prospects to his heart, and lead him into the way everlasting. Those who love God, who walk in his fear, who are partakers of his salvation, may lay claim to, and in due time will possess, comfort of which the stranger must be ignorant. They will enjoy peace and tranquillity; they will yield themselves up to God; and in so doing, they will prefer an humble claim to the infinite blessings which he has in store for those who are his people. As obedient children, they will be che-

rished, supported, and comforted: they will enjoy the presence of God, and some sweet anticipations of glory, which will allay their fears, quiet their griefs, supply them with an antidote to impatience, fill their hearts with love to God, and give them such a measure of joy and peace in believing in Christ Jesus, as will more than compensate their loss.

With this view the Christian mourner will eagerly consult his Bible, and desire that its spirit may be infused into his heart and life. He will find instruction suited to his case in almost every page; and if he be anxious to profit, he will not labour in vain. Its promises to the afflicted will prominently attract his notice. Here he will be encouraged, by the tender care of Jehovah for his sorrowing children, by the kind support he engages to afford, and by the inestimable benefits with which he covenants to crown those who wait for his blessing: promises, evincing the tender mercy and loving-kindness of God, fitted for every changing scene, and adapted to comfort and support under the most painful circumstances. Yet he will remember that these promises are made only to those who obey God, and keep his commandments: he will be careful not to appropriate them to himself, unless he

can trace an unfeigned desire to yield up the whole heart to him, whose it is, and who demands its homage. He will studiously examine the preceptive parts of Holy Writ, and desire that his feelings and his conduct may correspond with its principles. He will equally delight in those passages which demand the submission of the heart, as in those which bind up the broken-hearted, and proclaim peace and security to the wretched. He will be equally comforted by obedience to his heavenly Father, as by appropriating the supports which he has afforded. He will not take a partial view of the revealed will of God; for he will be anxious not to mistake on a subject so important, nor lose the benefit arising from his sufferings. He will desire, first, conformity to the spirit, and tone, and temper of the Bible; and then will anxiously wait, expect, and plead for peace and comfort.

A few passages of Sacred Writ are subjoined, with the view principally of rousing the mourner to inquire and diligently to search the Scriptures. "But when they in their trouble did turn unto the Lord God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them. Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground, yet man is born to trouble

as the sparks fly upward. Man that is born of a woman is of a few days, and full of trouble. They cause the cry of the poor to come unto Him, and he heareth the cry of the afflicted. When *He* giveth quietness, who then can make trouble; and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? Whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only. Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth; therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: for he maketh sore and bindeth up; he woundeth, and his hands make whole. He shall deliver thee in six troubles; yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee. If when evil come upon us as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house,) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help. And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers: and prayed unto him, and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplications, and brought him again to Jerusalem unto his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God. And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister

judgment to the people in uprightness. The Lord will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name, shall put their trust in thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee. For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee, at a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters, they shall not come nigh unto him. Thou art my hiding-place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about. But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord; he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them and deliver them. He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them because they trust in him. Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in trouble. The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he

shall set me up upon a rock. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. He forgetteth not the cryof the humble. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me. I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor. This is my comfort in mine affliction: for thy word hath quickened me. Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word. I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me. Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant. And it shall come to pass in the day that the Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve, &c. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver;

I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction. Sing O heavens, and be joyful O earth, and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted. Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light; let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. In all their affliction *He* was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity, he redeemed them, and he bare them and carried them all the days of old. But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion, according to the multitude of his mercies. In that day, saith the Lord, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted: and I will make her that halteth a remnant, and her that was cast afar off, a strong nation: and the Lord shall reign over them in Mount Sion, from henceforth and for ever. Verily, verily I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even

as others which have no hope. Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. Is any among you afflicted, let him pray. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord; thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then ye shall pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you, and ye shall seek me, and find me. When the righteous cry, the Lord heareth them, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God; therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings: they shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thine house; they shall drink of the rivers of thy pleasure. Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe, and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be

your strength. In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence. For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel."*

But once more—prayer is a source of consolation, and the best support under every sorrow. The surest way to obtain peace of mind, is to come to God, the never-failing fountain of happiness, and to entreat it of him. Prayer is the medium of communication between the soul and its God, between earth and heaven: and it serves at once to purify the desires, enlarge the understanding, and exalt the affections; while it ensures a rich supply of blessing from above. This is a source of comfort, which can never be taken from us. We may always pray. And we shall find that we are able to derive strength and support from this exercise, when we are inca-

* 2 Chronicles xv. 4. Job v. 6, 7; xiv. 1; xxxiv. 28, 29; v. 17—19. 2 Chronicles xx. 9; xxxiii. 12, 13. Psalm ix. 8—10; xxxii. 6—8, 10; xxxiv. 39, 40; xxxi. 10; xxvii 5; xxxvi. 1; cvii. 6; ix. 12; cxxxviii. 7; cxl. 12; cxix. 50, 67, 75, 76. Isaiah xiv. 3; xxxv. 10; xxxviii. 10; xxxix. 13; l. 10; liii. 9. Lamentations iii. 32. Micah iv. 6, 7. John xvi. 20. 1 Thessalonians iv. 13. Hebrews xi. 25, 26. James v. 13; iv. 10. Psalm xci. 4. Jeremiah xxix. 11—13. Psalm xxxiv. 17; xxxvi. 7, 8; cxix. 117. Hebrews xii. 7. Isaiah xxx. 15. Proverbs xiv. 26. Isaiah xli. 13, 16, &c. &c.

pable of appreciating the value of other sources of consolation.

When our hearts are overwhelmed with grief, when the anguish of our souls is too grievous to be borne, and we are almost ready to curse the day of our birth; when our minds are restless, and disturbed by embittered retrospects, and fearful gloomy prospects; when anxiety sweeps away every other barrier that would oppose its progress, and we are left destitute of earthly hope, in the most trying, agitating moments, God is with us, and he can give us peace. To Him then we can go, and seeking his support and blessing, in confessing our sins, and entreating their pardon through Christ Jesus, in devoting ourselves entirely to him, and submitting our will to his, in holding communion with the Father of our spirits, and reviewing the gentleness, kindness, and necessity of his dealings with us, in prayer and praise to him we shall obtain peace. The ray of divine light, which emanates from the throne of omniscient love, in passing to the uplifted eye of humble confidence, though it may be refracted by the tear of sorrow, or dimmed by the morbid hue of despair, yet forms its characteristic image on the mind, and gradually leads the aching heart to composure and depend-

ence upon God, to a quiet submission to his dispensations.

The exercise of prayer has an amazing influence in composing the agitated bosom. The heart which now throbs with the tumultuous heaving of a sorrow which knows no alleviation, will presently become calm; it will look to God, and exclaim, "Thou demandest the heart, and mine thou shalt have, O Lord." Prayer hushes to repose the contending passions of humanity. The fear of God, the tenderest love for lost relatives, the deepest sorrow, serve to lead the mind to a compassionate Father, Saviour, and Shepherd, rather than divert it from him. The affections, instead of wandering over the dear lost objects of creature attachment, and fixing on every agonizing circumstance, are led simply to the Deity, and rest in his goodness and infinite love, rather than on any thing short of an object so supremely glorious.

Prayer contributes in a great degree to raise the soul from earth, to engage the mind in spiritual pursuits, and by repeated exercise to strengthen faith and love in a crucified Redeemer, and to elevate our hopes and prospects to the salvation he has accomplished, and the blessings he has promised to those who follow him through

evil and good report. Let us then come boldly to a throne of grace, that we may be strengthened and find grace to help in every time of need. Whatever we require for our daily exigencies, and whatever extraordinary comforts our situation demands, are all treasured up in God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ; and are communicated to us in answer to fervent prayer, since for all these things will God be inquired of by the house of Israel. It is by prayer that we hold communion with God, and prefer our humble claim to the consolations of his grace; that we gain immediate access to the Father, and are enabled to plead the fulfilment of his gracious promises in our peculiar circumstances. And farther, when in approaching God, we lay open our whole souls at the footstool of his mercy; when we cast our burdens upon the Lord, and confess all our troubles to Him who is infinitely able and willing to advance our best interests; we feel peculiar composure from the assurance that he is entirely acquainted with our necessities that he watches over our concerns with tender care, that he is able to succour, and will enable us to bear every trial; that he will purify us, accept us, and grant us his reviving presence.

When we thus approach God, as our last and only refuge, we are earnestly concerned, that our hearts may be animated with a fervent desire of seeking, loving, and worshipping him; that no unsanctified wish may present itself to our minds, in opposition to his will; that we may entertain the conviction, that all our comforts are derived from him, and that our hearts may be animated with lively gratitude towards him. Thus we are kept active, are constantly reminded of our duty, and find that in serving God there is great delight.

It is, however, necessary that the heart should be warmed with a sense of its own immediate interest in the blessings it asks for; and that it should entertain exalted views of Jehovah's character as the father and the friend of his people: for, without some confidence in his goodness, some hope in his favour, the mind will be occupied by a thousand cares, which will disturb its attention, divert its views from heaven to earth, and fix its thoughts on self, rather than on its Creator and Preserver. This consideration will prevent our praying, but with submission to the appointments of Omnipotence; and will fill us with a deep sense of our own ignorance and indigence, accompanied with a conviction that our

sufficiency is of God alone, a genuine confession of our sinfulness, and humble earnest petition for pardon and acceptance.

Prayer under affliction is a peculiar duty, and an evidence of our desire of living entirely to the glory of God. To the sincere exercise of this duty is annexed a promise of infinite and eternal good. "Call upon me in the day of trouble. I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me. Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him."*

In our approaches to the throne of God, we are encouraged by the promise of his Spirit, who teacheth us how to pray, who intercedeth for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered; and by the permission to present our petitions in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord; whom God hath given to be our Mediator, Advocate, and Intercessor; through whom, as our High Priest, we have access to God within the vail; who sprinkles our services with his atoning blood, and will finally present us without spot or wrinkle, before the throne of his glory with exceeding joy.

* Ps. l. 15. Matt. vii. 7. Ps. cxlv. 19.

Again: when we present our petitions to God, and approach him with the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, we acknowledge our entire dependence upon him, and we commit ourselves and our concerns entirely to his guidance, disposal, and government. "In every thing, by "prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known unto God." In so doing, the mind acquires confidence in his goodness, while at the same time it is relieved from the cares and perplexities of arranging its own concerns. The mourner leaves himself in the arms of an all-wise and compassionate Saviour, and is happy. He enters into his closet in the dark season of affliction, and, having shut the door, he prays to his heavenly Father which is in secret, assured that his Father which seeth in secret, will reward him openly.

Prayer teaches us submission. We pray to be enabled to yield ourselves to his will; that he would govern us in the way most conducive to his glory, and our own everlasting good; that our hearts and minds may be renewed; that we may know no other desire than that of acquiescence in his disposal; that we may be led by his Spirit, to do whatever he enjoins, and carefully to avoid whatever he disapproves; that we may

be relieved from excessive care about our present welfare, and be brought to wait patiently upon God, for the infinitely superior blessings he has to bestow.

To those who humbly wait upon him will God grant abundance in poverty, and consolation in the deepest affliction. For, though our friends and dearest comforts are snatched away by death, yet God will not forsake us: he will not despise the cry of the humble contrite spirit, nor disappoint his prayer. He will draw us to himself, and will amply compensate the loss we have sustained in others, since he comprehends in himself every blessing; since he sustains to his people the most endearing relations, and will reveal to us the gracious wisdom of his designs, at that day, when his kingdom will be fully manifested. Thus, in waiting upon God, there is great reward, and in communion with him there is abundant consolation, and a good hope, through grace, of an eternal inheritance with the saints in light. Thus has a wise and gracious Father provided the richest consolations for his suffering children, to support them in their darkest hour, and to enable them to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, as they approach nearer the termination of their pilgrimage.

Thus is the name of the Lord a strong tower, into which the righteous runneth and is safe.

And now, my dear friend, having completed my design, and with the earnest prayer that the Author of benevolence would smile on this humble attempt, "I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, who is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among them which are sanctified. And now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen."*

* Acts xx. 32. Jude 24, 25.

THE END.

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